Presumption and Despair:

The figure of Bernard in Middle English imaginative literature

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Abstract

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This dissertation pursues two distinct but parallel projects in relation to the work of Bernard of Clairvaux and Middle English imaginative literature. First, I argue for a Bernardine anagogical lens as a way to better understand the deepest theological commitments and most distinctive formal innovations of certain key Middle English literary texts, especially *Piers Plowman* and *The Canterbury Tales*. Second, I outline a more genealogical project, tracing the figure of Bernard as it is explicitly invoked in widely circulated Middle English works including *Piers*, *The Parson's Tale*, and the *Prick of Conscience*. These two threads connect to suggest that the work of Bernard of Clairvaux can offer a new way to understand the relationship between theological and literary texts in the late Middle Ages. Because Bernard's influence in the vernacular is as much as matter of style as of content, it requires a more capacious way of theorizing the theological implications and even motivations of literary form. The "figure of Bernard" acts as a cipher for later works to explore their deepest intellectual preoccupations, and makes it possible to trace the way they imagine the anagogical interval between the presence and absence of Christ, the over- and under-estimation of the presence of eternity in time. The Bernardine themes of "presumption" and "despair" serve as a useful shorthand for signaling this theorization, and help me to extend its application beyond texts in which Bernard is explicitly invoked—including to writers, like Chaucer and Thomas Malory, whose work is often assumed to be firmly secular.

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Dedication

for Steve Roberts, who took me to Gethsemani and bought me some books,

and for Simonetta d'Italia-Wiener, who stopped for me.

Not to make sense, inside the keel of sweating ribs,

not to make sense but room.

—Rowan Williams, “Thomas Merton: summer 1966”

But what he knew by nature from eternity he learned by experience in time.

(“sed quod natura sciebat ab aeterno, temporali didicit experimento”)

—Bernard of Clairvaux, *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae*

Introduction

A Double Glow

Bernardine style and anagogical exegesis

It is no less important to recall that a doctrine does not exist only where it is laid out in didactic and scholarly fashion: it is also present *in actu* where it inspires thought; it can be there in a much more organic and much more powerful way than in some formula whose verbal balance and clarity leave nothing to be desired.

—Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*

The outstanding examples of the "Cistercian school," Étienne Gilson observed, were all "stylists": "Brought up in the school of Cicero and St. Augustine, they have renounced everything save the art of good writing." This applies most of all to their most famous representative. Gilson recalls that the "profound hesitation" of St. Bernard of Clairvaux's early years was the question "whether to become a man of letters or to become a saint" (7). Ultimately, Bernard chose both. From the very beginning, when he entered the fledgling Cistercian order at Citeaux with some thirty friends and family members in tow, Bernard was already preaching and converting, learning how best to use language in the service of his new vocation. As his friend William of St. Thierry wrote in the saint's *Vita Prima*, at that time Bernard "began to rejoice in the Spirit, for he was now the spiritual father of all those reborn in Christ, his own brothers, and

he saw clearly that the hand of the Lord was working with him. From this moment he set himself to assemble whomever he could by the force of words and began *to put on the new man*" (17). From the pen of William, who enlisted Bernard's rhetorical skill in multiple theological controversies,[1] the germ of this observation shines through in all its sincerity: for William, himself a gifted writer, Bernard is one who works "by the force of words," and whose capacity to use them is second to none. "From now on," William says, "when Bernard spoke either publicly or privately, mothers hid their sons from him, wives kept their husbands away from him, and friends fended off their friends from contact with him, because the Holy Spirit put so much power into his speech that hardly any other love could withstand its force" (19). The passion for "good writing" never left Bernard—he was composing his *Sermons on the Song of Songs* on his deathbed—and it left its mark on all who came into contact with him.

Testaments to the power of Bernard's rhetorical gifts echo down through the Middle Ages. Steven Botterill's study of Bernard's impact on Dante's *Divine Comedy*, where Bernard appears to complete Dante's journey through the heavenly spheres, provides a good introduction to the saint's legacy in the years following his death in 1153: "if there was one factor that linked the disparate perceptions of Bernard in late medieval culture – contemplative, Mariologist, ecclesiastical reformer, theologian of grace – it was the recognition of his uniquely efficacious use of language, especially in his preaching" (41). Thomas Aquinas celebrated Bernard "for the humility of his preaching," even if he was "reluctant to accept whole-heartedly his authority as a thinker" (30); likewise, for the Franciscan Spiritual Ubertino of Casale, "it is above all the *word*

[1] Bernard's disputes with Peter Abelard and Gilbert of Poitiers were both instigated at William's urging. G.R. Evans cites Otto of Freising's remark that "Bernard was so zealous for Christian truth that he was sometimes remarkably simple and credulous." According to Evans, William "captured [Bernard] for the cause by appealing to the crusader in him. . . .he could be relied upon, once he had taken up a cause, to give it all his considerable energies" (*The Mind of St. Bernard* 149).

that is Bernard's gift to posterity" (40). More probably influential in England is the view of Robert of Basevorn, the English author of the *Forma praedicandi*, an early fourteenth-century manual on the rhetoric of preaching. In the *Forma*, Robert lists Augustine, Gregory, and Bernard as the greatest preachers since Christ and St. Paul, and recommends these three as the definitive models for all aspiring preachers. In what is perhaps the "earliest technical analysis of [Bernard's] style" (Botterill 40), Robert speaks to the innovativeness of Bernard's rhetorical procedure:

> Now it should be realized that his method is without measure, exceeding the style and capability of almost all men of genius. He more than the rest stresses Scripture in all his sayings, so that scarcely one statement does not depend on the authority of the Bible or on a multitude of authorities. His procedure is always devout, always artful. He takes a certain theme or something in the place of it—i.e., some matter that he intends to handle—and begins it artfully, divides it now into two, now into three, now into many members, confirms it, and ends it, making use of every rhetorical color so that the whole work shines with a double glow, earthly and heavenly; and this, as it seems to me, invites to devotion those who understand more feelingly.
>
> ("Sciendum quod modus ejus est sine modo, modum excedens et capacitatem fere omnium ingeniorum, qui prae omnibus in omnibus dictis Scripturam inculcat, ut vix sit una sententia quae ex auctoritate Bibliae vel multis auctoritatibus non dependeat. Hic semper devote, semper artificialiter procedit. Aliquod thema certum, vel aliquid loco thematis, i[d est] materiam aliquam quam intendit tractare, accipit, quod artificaliter introducit, dividit nunc in duo membra, nunc in tria, nunc in plura, confirmat, concludit, omni utens colore rhetorico, ut totum opus utraque redolentia refulgeat, saeculari scilicet

et divina, quae, ut mihi videtur, magis motive intelligentes ad devotionem invitat . . . .") (247)[2]

"semper devote, semper artificialiter": borrowing from Bernard's own language to define his style—Bernard's popular treatise *De diligendo deo* ("On Loving God") famously argues that the "modus" ("measure") in which we are to love God is "sine modo" ("without measure") (I.1; III:119).[3]—Robert underlines the mix of feeling devotion and artful construction that characterizes Bernard's writing, especially the sermons on the *Song of Songs* and on the liturgical year that will be the touchstones of this study.

The twentieth-century theologian Henri de Lubac helps to draw out the theological implications of the liberty that Bernard takes with his scriptural and patristic sources:

> Furthermore, it is not merely by such or such an unprecedented interpretation, it is by his whole manner that Bernard treats Scripture with a new liberty; with an 'audacious liberty'. . . .'With the spirit of freedom going on before,' says Bernard himself. He uses it so freely, remarks [Bernard's friend and secretary] Geoffrey of Auxerre, 'that he seems rather to precede it than to follow it, to lead it where he wanted, himself following the Spirit who is its author.' Of him more than any other it therefore seems true to say that he does not properly speaking explicate the Scripture: he applies it; he does not clarify it: he clarifies everything by means of it, and the human heart to start with. . . .As Saint

[2] I have used Thomas Marie Charland's edition of the Latin text, cited in my Works Cited below. I have begun here with James J. Murphy's translation, which suggests "double glow" for "utraque redolentia." I have adopted Murphy's usage because more literal translations all seemed to lose something of the original sense. "Double fragrance" is maybe the closest.

[3] All references to Bernard are given with reference to the relevant sections of the work itself first, followed by the volume number and page number at which the text appears in Jean Leclercq's edition of Bernard's *Opera*. Both are given in parentheses, and the section references are separated from the references to Leclercq's edition by a semicolon. In general, I have begun with the translations provided by the Cistercian Fathers series, then adapted the translations when they seemed to me to need it. Each translation I have used is cited in my Works Cited below.

> Augustine had done in a few pages of lyric exaltation, but more habitually, he composes centos. He pulls the texts from their context. He appropriates them. (152)

Bernard's Augustinian "centos" model a beguiling mix of unprecedented citationality and unprecedented flexibility: he says almost nothing but scripture, but does almost anything he wants with it. It is as if in Bernard's sermons scripture simply becomes experience, it is so deeply digested into the author's way of seeing the whole world and of understanding himself.[4] This revolutionary new style leads de Lubac to call Bernard not only "the last of the Fathers"—a traditional title still used by the Trappist Thomas Merton in his twentieth-century celebration of the saint—but also "the first of the great moderns," marked by his "interiorizing contemplation," "preoccupied above all with the spiritual conversion and interior life" yet nonetheless "never . . . individualistic." De Lubac terms this way of making scripture a site of "experience" "mystical tropology": "At such a degree of interiority, allegory is no longer distinct from tropology; mystery and morality are united in a single mystic vision full of sweetness" (175). In Bernard's writings, a thread that had been lost since Augustine's *Confessions* is picked back up, precisely because it is a matter not just of theological content but of literary style: Bernard's exegetical "spirit of freedom" extends into a renewed interiorization of scripture, and a daring willingness to expand its application beyond any previously circumscribed exegetical sphere.

This dissertation examines the influence of Bernard's stylistic and theological innovations in Middle English imaginative literature. Evaluating Bernard's impact on later literary works, I will not be applying the ideas of a speculative theologian or literary theorist to more putatively complex literary texts. I will be doing something more like describing a dialogue

[4] Jean Leclercq remarks that Bernard "is convinced of what he calls 'the unity of the Scriptures'; that everything in them is meaningful and can be discovered by an ingenuous love. . . .Bernard reaches a sort of Biblical 'experience', a 'lived' comprehension of the truths that it teaches" ("The School of Cîteaux" 193).

between artists, comparing one work of what Nicolette Zeeman has called "imaginative theory" with another.[5] This approach itself has roots in Bernard's rhetorical style. Robert of Basevorn summarized Bernardine style with the word "inculcatio" ("inculcation"). "Inculcatio" happens, Robert says, when "allusio" ("allusion")—"when Scripture is touched upon without being quoted as such" ("quando Scriptura tangitur, non allegatur")—occurs "on many occasions or continuously" ("multum in pluribus vel continue"). According to Robert, "It is the blessed Bernard in particular who has made use of these rhetorical colors" ("Quibus coloribus praecipue usus est beatus Bernardus"). Bernardine "inculcation" requires an interpretive flexibility from its reader, and in particular a willingness to follow "allusion" even when it occurs "not in the same way in which it was written down, but while changing the subject or the grammatical case" ("non eodem modo quo scripta est, sed mutatur vel persona vel casus") (320). As we will see, many later writers changed the "subject" of Bernard's writings, but a substrate of Bernardine thinking and style is nonetheless identifiable in, and important for understanding, their work. "Inculcatio" models the possibility of absorbing a source in such a way that the seams between original and copy, allusion and source, seem almost to disappear. This does not mean that what is being done with the source is not original, even revolutionary. Close attention will be required to discern the shared theoretical underpinnings, and the sharp departures, that mark the complex interplay between Bernard and his literary heirs.

[5] Zeeman describes "the possibility of literary theory expressed in 'literary' form," drawing particular attention to the way "the literary text—especially in the vernacular—was in a disciplinary sense 'different', a site from which to enter into dialogue with, or even counter, the teachings of the schools. . . .Later fourteenth-century English writers such as Chaucer and Langland signal in a variety of ways their distance and disengagement from the traditional intellectual formulations and teaching methods endorsed by the schools" ("Imaginative Theory" 225-6). Bernard, in the controversies mentioned above, also often signaled his distance from the schools. Bernardine literary theory, and Bernardine theology itself, is always distinctly embedded in a literary form, and clearly demonstrates Zeeman's claim that "theory can be expressed in figural terms" (240).

Bernardine anagogy

The cornerstone of the Bernardine "theory," in my reading, is what Robert of Basevorn calls the "double glow, earthly and heavenly." If this designates, in technical terms, Bernard's artful combination of rhetorical "colors" and bursts of apparently artless "measure"-lessness, it also indicates that with Bernard we remain firmly anchored in what Jean Leclercq calls the "dialectics of presence and absence, possession and non-possession, certainty and uncertainty, light and darkness, faith and eternal life" that characterize the pre-eschatological *saeculum* (*Love of Learning* 25). De Lubac describes the way this aspect of Bernard's work generates a dramatic play of approach and retreat, departure and return: "This is what he calls the 'alternations,' the 'vicissitudes of the Word going and coming back' . . . the 'drama of vicissitude,' a drama which is the necessary expression of temporal and pilgrim existence, and consequently, 'the authentic criterion of a real experience of God'" (160). Bernard is the unparalleled master of producing this effect. Although de Lubac discusses the distinctiveness of the Bernardine style most of all in terms of "mystical tropology," I will refer to Bernard's distinctive "double glow" here in terms of de Lubac's fourth and final sense of scripture: "anagogy." This is the sense that "completes the movement of mystical tropology" (188), and that was already for Origen and Jerome "one of the names of the spiritual sense in general" (180). For all the importance of the Cistercian tropological "interiorization," the dialogue with Bernard in later literary writers was even more marked by an attraction to the sense in which, in Bernard's writing, even in the flow and flux of time, the "earthly and the heavenly" sometimes appear to shimmeringly coincide. G.R. Evans describes "that duality, that lively tension between this world and the next, which [Bernard] found so stimulating in everything he did" (*The Mind of St. Bernard* 114). "More concretely," de Lubac says, the anagogical is "the sense that lets one see in the realities of the earthly Jerusalem

those of the heavenly Jerusalem: 'for a certain part of the earthly city has been made an image of the heavenly city'" (180).[6] This does not mean that the earthly image is to be arithmetically equated with the heavenly reality it points to; for, although Bernard "was quite able to refer to Clairvaux as the true Jerusalem," it is a "mark of the mediocre" to move from looking for "authoritative examples" and "divine indications" to affirming "a historical bond grounding some sort of exclusivity" (150).[7] Genuine anagogy must maintain its tension forward, while remaining firmly grounded in the present intimations of eternal truth: "For Christianity is a fulfillment, but in this very fulfillment it is a promised hope. Mystical or doctrinal, taught or lived, true anagogy is therefore always eschatological. It stirs up the desire for eternity in us" (197). What de Lubac calls the *futura* ("future things") are always mysteriously present in the *invisibilia* ("invisible things") on earth, but never fully fulfilled there; the two aspects of anagogy are interdependent and intertwined.[8] Bernard's anagogical double glow maintains this tension between future fulfillment and present desire.

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[6] In Bernard's fourth *Missus est* homily *In Praise of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, he explains that Christ is said to reign over Jerusalem, even though he never did in the literal, historical sense, "because, as we have already said, the throne on which [David] sat in time bore the image of the eternal throne" ("idcirco, ut iam dictum est, memoratur fuisse David, quia haec, in qua temporaliter sedit, aeternae illius gerebat imaginem"). This is extrapolated into a general interpretive principle: "However, as we know, there is another Jerusalem meant, one different from that which now is, where David reigned, one far more noble and far richer. I think that this is the one meant here, in the manner of speaking frequently found in Scripture, where the signifying thing is put for the thing signified" ("Sed novimus quamdam aliam Ierusalem ab ea, quae nunc est, in qua regnavit David, designatam, multo ista nobiliorem, multo ditiorem. Hanc igitur puto hic fuisse significatam, illo videlicet usu loquendi, quo saepe reperis in Scripturis, significans poni pro significato") (4.1; IV:46-7).

[7] Leclercq notes, however, that Bernard sometimes stressed "the conviction that the life lived in the Cistercian Order and especially at Clairvaux bears importantly on the glory of God and the good of all mankind, almost as though outside Clairvaux there was no salvation" (*A Second Look* 90). I will deal with this "exclusive" mentality somewhat in Chapter Two. Constance Berman's study *The Cistercian Evolution* suggests that this mentality led to internal divisions within the Cistercian Order, where Bernard's influence and the influence of Clairvaux could be perceived as overwhelming.

[8] M.B. Pranger contrasts Bernardine anagogy with Erich Auerbach's influential idea of the medieval "figura" with respect to this tension: "What breaks down [in Bernard's writing] is Auerbach's construct of *figura* of an event that 'is enacted according to an ideal model which is the prototype situated in the future and thus far only promised.' As a result, the sequel of this promise also breaks down: the fact, that is, that the same event is 'already fulfilled in God' turning *figura* into 'the tentative form of something eternal and timeless.' Bernard's version is much more radical than that. There is just no bi-polarity. By blending coming and going he establishes a *figura* that comprises past and future because it is based on a present that is not a prototype or a model but a reality" ("Bernard the Writer" 235). In

Although Bernard's writing was to prove widely influential and his Order destined to become a mainstay of western monasticism, it is important to remember that the newness of the Cistercian style was felt at least by some at the time as a decisive break with the past: "For whether it be a matter of admiration or of scandal, the same word is upon all lips in the first half of the twelfth century just as at the time of the first Christians: novelty. 'What is this new law? This new doctrine? Whence does it arise? Whence comes this new and unheard of presumption?'" (de Lubac 151). This at least was not just a matter of style: for all its commitment to a renewed sense of simplicity and re-dedication to the Benedictine rule, the Cistercian Order was marked by a striking number of cultural and procedural innovations—from its emphasis on personal choice as exemplified in its "break with the oblate system," to its eschewing "peasant feudal labor" in favor of "bearded lay monks" known as the *conversi*, defining the "social catholicity of its appeal" (Lawrence 167), to its "partly representative legislature," consisting of general chapters that were in their time "the only international assemblies known to Europe" (174).[9] C.H. Lawrence judges that the Order's "advocates conveyed all the exhilarating sense of taking part in a great movement of reform, which was also a revival of a heroic past" (169). Early Cistercian converts like Bernard were marked by a "determination to renew the concept of the monastic vocation as a spiritual adventure freely chosen by the individual in response to a divine call" (165). The corollary of de Lubac's

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this respect, perhaps more than de Lubac admits, Bernard himself occasionally asserts even on the exegetical level "a historical bond grounding some sort of exclusivity" (de Lubac 150). But another way of looking at this would be to say that, more than Pranger realizes, Bernard maintains the "bi-polarity" between figure and fulfillment while straining it toward its vanishing point in the Incarnation. Present reality is not a "prototype"; neither is it quite ever beatitude.

[9] Louis J. Lekai notes that the Cistercian "lay-brotherhood" was not "an altogether revolutionary innovation," but "no other order employed lay-brothers on such a large scale and with such great efficiency." He points out that the *conversi* were not to be "exploited merely as laborers; they were treated as religious, members of a monastic community" (334). C.H. Lawrence, however, notes that in the later years of the twelfth-century, "most Cistercian abbeys became large-scaled landed proprietors, differing from the older monasteries only in that they exploited their estates largely with their own labour-force instead of leasing them to tenants" (176).

interiorized "mystical tropology" on the level of practice lay in the Order's innovative insistence on the importance of individual freedom and communal self-rule.

Perhaps in part because he was conscious of the way these innovations provoked accusations of novelty and presumption, the originally Augustinian theme of "presumption" and its opposite "despair" is ubiquitous in Bernard's writings, including in some of his most influential works. Tracing this phrase will be one important way I trace the influence of Bernardine anagogical thinking and style.[10] Although the formula's appearance in a literary text is by no means a guarantee of Bernard's direct influence, "presumption and despair" acts as a kind of informal signature that tends to show up where Bernard is being directly or indirectly invoked, and that at the very least signals an interest in the category of issues that were raised by the Cistercian innovations—a deep dive into interiority that also necessitated serious thinking on the way the eternal relates to its manifestations in time, the way spirit relates to flesh, and so on. The pairing of presumption and despair therefore also tends to bring with it the fundamental problem of anagogy, which itself traces a middle way, on the exegetical level, between despairing of the eternal significance in things and presuming to comprehensively grasp it. To "presume" is typically, for Bernard, to pretend to understand something you ultimately cannot; to despair is to give up on trying.

In short, Bernard stands at the hinge of Christian intellectual history, not just stylistically but theologically and culturally, in terms of his participation in an influential reform movement that stressed individual freedom and personal experience as its keynotes, even as it paradoxically insisted that freely chosen humility and communal obedience were the highest virtues. If Bernard

[10] Susan Snyder traces the pairing to Augustine's *Sermo CXLV*. She comments: "The law gives us fear, which is a check on presumption; then grace gives us hope, lest we despair. But the transition may be perilous. Fear is the gift of God, but if not followed by hope it is death-dealing, like the law without grace and the letter without the spirit" (22).

was the "last of the Fathers," spoken of in the same breath with Augustine and Gregory the Great, he is also one of the only medieval theologians besides Augustine to be consistently invoked with respect and even fondness in the work of the magisterial reformers Martin Luther and John Calvin.[11] As a writer and as a thinker, Bernard is just as prescient as he is traditional, and almost as influential after the Reformation as he was before. The greatest of the Cistercian "stylists," "exceeding the style and capability of almost all men of genius," Bernard of Clairvaux is also truly the "first of the great moderns," as de Lubac suggests but does not pursue. Pursuing this topic here will take us through a survey of Middle English literature in a new and "double" light.

Chapter summaries

Because William Langland's fourteenth-century poem *Piers Plowman* deals explicitly with both genuinely Bernardine and popular Pseudo-Bernardine texts, it is a good starting place for an examination of Bernard's legacy in Middle English imaginative literature. In Chapter One, "Noonday Ambivalence: Re-examining Langland's Nede in the light of Bernardine theology," I bracket the question of Bernard's explicit presence in the poem in favor of pursuing a deeper parallel that resonates with a neglected but essential dimension of *Piers Plowman*: the poem's distinctly anagogical sensibility, and its consequently fine attunement to the sense of Christ's alternating presence and absence in time. By applying an anagogical lens to the figure of Nede, generated from a close reading of Bernard's thirty-third sermon on the *Song of Songs*, I argue that the critical impasse around Nede is a deliberate effect artfully induced by Langland,

[11] See Bernard McGinn's Introduction to Bernard's *On Grace and Free Choice* for comments on the importance of Bernard's influence on the magisterial reformers (45-50). M.B. Pranger more directly parallels Luther and Bernard, and argues that the former fundamentally misunderstood the latter, in his article "'Perdite vixi': Bernard de Clairvaux et Luther devant l'échec existentiel."

signaling an attempt to crystallize the poem's eschatologically inflected vision centered on neediness and the soul's necessarily fragmented experience of time. Although this reading overlaps with the readings of some other critics—Jill Mann's in particular—I push beyond them to suggest that there are in fact deep reasons for the critical uneasiness around the figure of Nede, and that these must be framed in terms of an attempt to represent an obscure "noonday" temptation that consists precisely in the inability to recognize a present good. This reading serves to illustrate the potential productivity of reading Bernard alongside the literary texts under his influence, and of re-reading works of theological "imaginative theory" alongside literary texts more generally.

In Chapter Two, "The Two Bernards: Tensions in Bernardine theology and its literary heirs," I move from the inductive method employed in Chapter One to making a more deductive set of connections grounded in specific historical contexts. I begin where I left off with *Piers*, drawing out the implications of Chapter One to offer a new reading of Langland's relationship with the figure of Conscience and with important tensions in fourteenth-century theology. Building on the work of Richard Firth Green and William J. Courtenay in particular, I argue that Langland uses the figure of Bernard as a stand-in for an at the time already traditional and even somewhat outmoded, "covenantal" form of Christian thinking, while at the same time pushing beyond Bernard to apply an apocalyptic lens to the institutional configurations of the Christian Church itself. Mid-chapter I switch critical modes to show that there was another influential strand in Bernard's thinking that had an equally strong, almost opposite influence on prominent literary texts in the saint's lifetime and after: a dualistic drift, exemplified in his crusade preaching and in the popular Pseudo-Bernardine *Meditationes piissimae de cognitione humanae conditionis* ("Pious Meditations on the Understanding of the Human Condition"), that led him to

stress the divides between spirit and flesh, soul and body, the cloister and the world. I show how Bernard's crusade preaching may have shaped the songs of the troubadour Jaufre Rudel, master of the "amor du lonh" ("love from afar") lyric, and explore the literary and real-world consequences of the un-anagogical dualism it modeled. Jaufre provides me with a direct literary parallel with Bernard's preaching, and a point of likely direct contact from which to begin my examination of Bernard's influence in the vernacular. I also introduce the *Meditationes piisimae* as a crucial text for understanding the "figure of Bernard" in medieval England. As Steven Botterill argues, "it is less important to decide how 'correct' [an author's] view of Bernard was, in terms of its conformity to the historical record, than it is to consider its particular orientation and its consequences for [the author's] own thought and poetry"; "The point is not what is true, but what is believed" (21). The pervasive appeal of the *Meditationes* illustrates this well.

My interest in the *Meditationes piissimae*, a bleakly fascinating and under-studied text, leads me on to a fuller exposition of the treatise and of its influence in the Middle English vernacular—both as a foundation and inspiration for the widely circulated poem called the *Prick of Conscience*, and as an adversarial foil for the neglected theological underpinnings of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. In Chapter Three, "'Bernard the monk ne saugh nat all': Chaucerian theology and the Bernardine tradition," I argue for a new understanding of Chaucer as a committed counter-theologian, whose garrulous figure of the Host embodies an anagogical theology precisely calibrated to counteract the effects of the *Prick*'s and *Meditationes*' *futura*-obsessed gloom. In Harry Bailey, Chaucer constructs an anagogical figure so firmly anchored in time and in the body that his eternal significance is almost too embedded to be seen. In my view, the figure of the Host is in fact in line with some of the most distinctive tendencies in Bernard of Clairvaux's own exegetical method: in particular, with his attention to what Bernard calls, in the

De diligendo deo ("On Loving God") treatise, the "tongue" ("loquela") of the flesh, which speaks to the spirit even if it must be ultimately subordinated to it. An examination of Bernard's direct and indirect presence in Chaucer's work makes it possible to see how Chaucer, in an importantly different way from Langland, responds with force and originality to some of the key theological currents of his time. The Host more than anyone embodies Robert of Basevorn's assessment of Bernardine style: "saeculari scilicet et divina" ("earthly and also divine"), the apparently secular Host in fact shines with a divine "double glow" that requires a re-assessment of Chaucer's poetry in terms of its deep theological commitments.

I end with my least likely theological interlocutor, and so with an attempt to extend the interpretive agenda of my dissertation to an even more thoroughly secular figure: Sir Thomas Malory. In Chapter Four, "'In good tyme': After despair in Malory's 'Book of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere,'" I re-trace the tight formal structuring of the *Morte Darthur*'s penultimate book, arguing that Malory's most original additions serve an authorial agenda centered on some of the key terms of Bernardine thought: his concern with "presumption" in particular, and the worry of despair that is its theological shadow. In the figure of Lancelot, Malory concentrates his thinking on distinctly theological questions about sin, self-knowledge, and the soul's relationship with its origin in God, culminating in the enigmatic miracle that marks the end of his original "Sir Urry" sequence. Returning to Chapter One's procedure of reading Bernardine theology alongside rather than into literary texts, I suggest that a Bernardine lens on Lancelot's experience can help us to see what Malory is attempting with the elaborate rearrangement of his sources that marks the "Book of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere." Even here, I remain grounded in lines of real intellectual filiation: the Old French *Queste del Saint Graal*, which is still thought to be a possibly Cistercian production, provides Malory with a theological backdrop against which to

push and from which to draw some of the deepest sources of his own theoretical interventions. Much like Langland, Malory proves to be thinking with and against Bernardine ideas, even if in this case Bernard's direct influence is perhaps unlikely. Taking Malory seriously as an "imaginative theologian" in Barbara Newman's terms, I explore the implications of her claim that "when Malory is forced to choose between sacred and secular values, he chooses both" (109).

To conclude, I turn back to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* to ask what Bernard's particular reputation for Marian devotion, decisive in the late Middle Ages but unexamined in the body of my dissertation, has to say to my dominant themes of anagogical presence and the influence of Bernardine writings in Middle English imaginative literature. A compressed close reading of one of Bernard's *Missus est* homilies pairs with a brief reading of Chaucer's *Second Nun's Tale* to model the way vernacular texts could draw inspiration from, and radically widen out the meaning of, Bernard's "figure." The Second Nun, unlike many of the authors I explore in this study, explicitly cites her source in Bernard, but his influence is much more deeply inculcated than even this direct citation suggests. The story of Bernard's reception in the Middle English vernacular is marked by these kinds of conscious and unconscious repossessions; this is why it requires a close and careful reading to assess its significance. Bernard is referenced, as Robert of Basevorn described the rhetorical device of "inculcation," "on many occasions or continuously," but "not in the same way in which it was written down." The Second Nun's self-consciously "feithful" practice of "translacioun," designed to "ydelnesse withstonde," models a form of "leveful bisynesse" that resists both presumption and despair, respecting the gap between original and translation without giving up on the "werche" it takes to faithfully bridge it: "Wel oghten we to doon al oure entente" (VIII.5-25). I have attempted to do that sort of work here.

Chapter 1

Noonday Ambivalence

Re-examining Langland's Nede in the light of Bernardine theology

And so I think that with your maul you will hew out for yourself from these cliffs something that you would not have gotten by the keenness of your talented mind from the bookshelves of the schoolmasters, and at times you will in the heat of midday, in the shade of the trees, have sensed something you would never have learned in the schools.

("Unde arbitror, quod malleo illo tuo aliquid tibi de rupibus illis excuderis, quod sagacitate ingenii, de magistrorum scriniis non tulisses; et nonnunquam tale aliquid in meridiano fervore, sub umbris arborum senseris, quale nunquam didicisses in scholis.")

—Bernard of Clairvaux, letter to Aelred of Rievaulx, Preface to the *Mirror of Charity*

Bernard of Clairvaux is a paradoxical figure. He famously described himself, in a letter written in the wake of the Second Crusade's failure, as the "chimaera of his age," referring to the bizarre mixture of mystical contemplation and active, ever-mobile praxis he recognized in himself and in his uniquely gyrovantic career as the politically and ecclesiastically active abbot of Clairvaux (Ep. 250.4; 402).[1] This paradoxical quality is also characteristic of his thought,

[1] Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I have not had access to the seventh and eighth volumes of Leclercq and Rochais's *Sancti Bernardi Opera*, which contain the edited Latin texts of Bernard's *Epistolae*. They are not held at

which made it possible for the great mystic of the love of God to sponsor the first military order of warrior monks, and to enthusiastically advocate for not only the failed Second Crusade but also a later, follow-up crusade that never took place.[2] One way to address the apparent contradictions in Bernard's life and thought would be to speak, as David Aers does, of something like "Constantinian Christianity": Bernard inherits a somewhat debased, or at least compromised, Christendom, the covetousness of which has completely obscured the purity of the primitive church of holy fools.[3] Rowan Williams takes a softer version of this line when he suggests that there is a tendency in Bernard's thought, and in the thought characteristic of his time, to obscure "the eschatological tension between Church and society": for some in the twelfth century, at least, Christendom simply is Christianity, and the literal defense of kingdoms gets confused with the anagogical quest for the Kingdom of God ("Three Styles" 28).[4]

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the library of the University of Kentucky, where I finished this dissertation. I have therefore provided the letter number and section number from Leclercq's edition, followed by the page number of the corresponding passage in the translation by Bruno Scott James, separated by a semicolon.

[2] Jean Leclercq observes: "In 1149 and 1150, after the failure of the military expedition into the Holy Land, [Bernard] accepted a project which had already been germinating in certain minds, an attack on Constantinople by the Western forces (the idea was eventually thwarted by divisions among the princes). However, it was a matter of conquering them, not as schismatics, but as the political adversaries of the Crusaders. Bernard recognized that their political separation from Rome constituted a violent situation, an absence of peace—*iuncti fide*, *pace divisi*. He reminded Eugenius III of his responsibility as universal pastor. Bernard desired reconciliation" ("Saint Bernard's Attitude toward War" 34-5).

[3] I refer to Aers's study *Beyond Reformation?: An Essay on William Langland's Piers Plowman and the End of Constantinian Christianity*. I will engage with Aers more directly later in this chapter.

[4] Nevertheless, as Leclercq notes, Bernard's fellow Cistercian Isaac of Stella, otherwise awestruck in his veneration of the saint, dubbed the rise of military-monastic orders like the Templars' "new militias" ("novae militiae") a "new monstrosity" ("monstrum novum"), scoffing, "Those who died in this depopulation were called martyrs. . . .How would such behavior compare with the patience of Christ, his gentleness, and manner of preaching?" ("siqui autem de eo in depopulatione talium ceciderint, Christi martyres nuncupent. . . .Quomodo objicietur ei Christi mansuetudo, patientia, ac forma praedicandi?"). Isaac does qualify himself—"not that what they do is altogether evil, but because it can become the occasion of evil. For (miserable fact) nearly all evils have sprung from good things" ("nec quia fortasse omnino sunt mala, quae agunt: sed quia fore malorum occasiones queunt. Nam (quod miserabile est) omnia fere mala de rebus bonis inoleverunt")—but not before making it clear that Bernard's attitude toward the Templars, and toward the relationship between the church and violence in general, was not universally held or uncontroversial (*PL* Vol. 194, cols. 1854b-1854c). I will cite the *Patrologia Latina* by volume and column number in parentheses, using the abbreviation *PL*.

These difficulties, of course, are not limited to Bernard's twelfth century. The saint's striking lament, in the letter cited above, that he is "neither cleric nor layman," and that, having "kept the habit of monk," he nonetheless "long ago abandoned the life" (Ep. 250.4; 402), is in fact reminiscent of the fundamental dilemma faced by William Langland's protagonist Will in the long fourteenth-century allegorical poem *Piers Plowman*. *Piers* also incorporates a nuanced array of responses to the thought of St. Bernard, including citations of both genuinely Bernardine and Pseudo-Bernardine materials, and embodies in its own way the central tension that characterizes Bernard's own thought—a tension between what I will call "pilgrim" and "crusading" theologies, a mysticism of love and an incipiently violent dualism. It therefore demonstrates how the figure of Bernard can serve as a surprisingly malleable touchstone for later literary authors in addressing their own most fundamental concerns, and serves as an appropriate introduction to the subject of Bernard's influence in Middle English imaginative literature.

Will's own crisis of purpose is adumbrated in *Piers Plowman*'s opening lines:

In a somur sesoun whan softe was the sonne
Y shope me into shroudes as Y a shep were;
In abite as an heremite vnholy of werkes
Wente forth in the world wondres to here,
And say many selles and selkouthe thynges. (C.Prol.1-5)[5]

At once an "heremite" and "vnholy," habited only "as" a sheep, Langland's Will is never quite comfortable with his position in the world—and, like Bernard, he expends immense rhetorical energy worrying over it. This acute sense of unsettledness, and Langland's complex response to it, indicates a significant parallel between the poet's and the monk's most fundamental

[5] All references to Piers Plowman are to are to Derek Pearsall's edition of the C-Text, cited in my Works Cited below. References will be given by passus and line numbers, in parentheses.

intellectual concerns: Will's search for a "kynde knowyng" (C.I.137) of the truth and of true love amid the "wondres" of the world, which he requests of Holy Church in Passus I of the poem, runs parallel to and draws directly on Bernard's lifelong attempt to articulate a theology of "experience," which Emero Stiegman has called the "preeminent distinguishing mark of his thought." As Stiegman points out, Bernard refers to the Song of Songs, the subject of his decades-spanning, unfinished masterwork *Sermones super cantica canticorum* ("*Sermons on the Song of Songs*"), as the "book of experience," which he sets alongside Scripture and creation as, for the first time, a "third revelatory book" ("Bernard of Clairvaux" 138). Along similar lines, Eleanor Johnson stresses that "in *Piers*, the literary rendering of participatory contemplation is an *experience*, a zone of sensory complexities to be wandered through, as a means for grasping abstract truths about God that remain, always, slightly beyond discursive, rational access" (*Staging Contemplation* 76).[6] Across the space of two centuries, the poet and the monk pursue parallel projects: the opening up of a space for a theology of experiential participation, where something like "kynde knowyng," or experience itself—Bernard writes, in the first of his sermons on the Songs, that "Only the anointing [of the Holy Spirit] can teach the song, and it is learned by experience alone" ("Istiusmodi canticum sola unctio docet, sola addiscit experientia") (1.11; I:7)—is placed firmly at the center of Christian thinking.

Langland in fact draws on both genuinely Bernardine and Pseudo-Bernardine materials to determine what it means to know something "kyndly." These citations occur in their most

[6] Likewise, James Simpson has suggested that, "In seeking discussions of the *forma tractandi* of scriptural writing which might be relevant to *Piers Plowman*, we should turn specifically to theologians for whom theology was regarded as an affective rather than a speculative mode of knowledge, concerned with the good rather than with the true, and experienced through the will rather than conceived through the intellect" ("From Reason to Affective Knowledge" 5). Bernard, whose "accounts of the contemplative experience tends to fall overwhelmingly on the affective side of the mystical experience" (Cvetkovic 101), and whose "emphasis on *voluntas*, at the level of which he locates the image of God," comes "at the expense of memory and intellect" (51-2), fits this description to a T. Traugott Lawler describes Langland's Imaginatif—who is, in the C-Text's Passus XIII, the figure in the poem who explicitly defines the role of Nede in the humbled ascent to God—as "the capacity to profit from experience" (113).

concentrated form in Will's conversation with Liberum Arbitrium in Passus XVI of the C-Text, where Bernardine and Pseudo-Bernardine texts are mashed together to recommend suspicion of over-intellectualized forms of knowledge: "'*Beatus*,' saith seynt Bernard, '*qui scripturas legit / Et verba vertit in opera* emforth his power' / Coueytyse to conne and to knowe sciences / Potte out of Paradys Adam and Eue: / *Sciencie appetitus hominem immortalitatis gloriam spoliauit*" (C.XVI.222-6). The first Latin citation here, a Pseudo-Bernardine passage that parallels several genuinely Bernardine texts,[7] crystallizes one of the most essential anxieties that drives *Piers Plowman*: the need to escape the realm of infinite "verba" and know with certainty what one really ought to do. This passage's final line, a genuine citation of Bernard's *Sermo IV in Ascensione Domini*, prompts Liberum Arbitrium to reflect on the need for thoughtful moderation in one's pursuit of knowledge: "'*Non plus sapere*,' saide the wyse, '*quam oportet sapere*, / Laste synne of pruyde wexe'" (C.XVI.229-30). This scriptural citation of Romans 12:3, which Traugott Lawler in *The Penn Commentary on Piers Plowman* links to the influence of Bernard as well (159),[8] fairly summarizes the role the figure of St. Bernard explicitly plays in the poem: the

[7] Pearsall cites the *Tractatus de Ordine Vitae* (*PL* Vol. 184, col. 566c), but this work seems to draw on an earlier source for the phrase (Alford 396).

[8] Lawler points out that this scriptural citation occurs in conjunction with the proverb that just precedes this passage in the poem (Proverbs 25.27)—"*Sicut qui mel comedit multum, non est ei bonum; sic qui scrutator est magestatis, opprimetur a gloria*" (C.XVI.217)—also in Bernard's fifteenth sermon *De diversis*, which, he says, along with Bernard's *Sermo IV in Ascensione Domini*, "reads almost like a commentary on *Piers Plowman*." Lawler observes that "it is hard not to think that L[angland] has Bernard in mind all through this passage" (159). There are in fact multiple moments in this latter sermon that suggest Langland may have had direct knowledge of it. For my purposes it is particularly interesting that Bernard says, in the section just preceding the passage that Langland cites, that even "the experience of harsh need to which we have been handed over by our senseless appetite for knowledge" ("durae experientia necessitatis, cui sumus addicti per insipientem scientiae appetitum") will not necessarily dissuade us from ascending the mountain of prideful, unnecessary knowledge (4; V:140). Christ, on the other hand, "ascended in the very act of descending" ("in hoc ipso quod descenderit, ascendisse") (3; V:139). It is also interesting that this sermon explains this descent by humility with a creative use of the word "passus," which is so evidently crucial for *Piers Plowman*: Christ "was going step by step, as it were, so that from strength to strength the God of gods might be seen on Zion ("velut quisbusdam passibus ibat, ut de virtute in virtutem videretur Deus deorum in Sion") (6; V:143). Near the beginning of the sermon, Bernard compares God's actions in the world to a writer's skillful arrangement of his materials: "For just as a writer arranges everything for specific reasons, so the things that are from God are appointed; and especially those performed by [his] majesty present in the flesh" ("Sicut enim qui scribit, certis rationibus collocat universa, ita quae a Deo sunt, ordinata sunt, maximeque ea quae praesens in carne est operata maiestas") (2; V:139).

voice of the Cistercian saint consistently recalls the Dreamer to the pursuit of "kynde knowyng," of "*quam oportet sapere*" ("what it is necessary to know"), to the exclusion of any immoderate "*sciencie appetitus*." Another Pseudo-Bernardine citation at another crucial moment in the poem focalizes this question of what one needs to know around the problem of self-knowledge in particular: "*Multi multa sciunt et seipsos nessiunt*" ("Many know many things and do not know themselves") (C.XI.163), Scripture says, in the B-Text in response to Will's changing the subject away from helping the needy to criticize the clergy (B.X.359-60).[9] "lakkede… in Latyn" and weeping with wrath, Will falls asleep at once and is "rauysched . . . into the lond of longyng and loue" (C.XI.162-7), where he has to confront his own sins and limitations.

As in the opening sequence of the poem, where Will implores Holy Church to "Teche me to no tresor but telle me this ilke, / How Y may saue my soule" (C.I.79-80), the Bernardine call to moderation and self-awareness in the pursuit of knowledge raises the inevitable question of just how it is that one is to distinguish between the unnecessary "tresor" of intellectual vainglory and the necessary knowledge of salvation. It is in facing this question that the deepest thematic concerns of the poet and the monk most overlap. Langland does not make explicit use of the Bernardine language of "experience," but he does invent his own vocabulary for filling in an analogous gap in Will's understanding: an experience of "nede" that alone makes possible an appropriately moderated "kynde knowing," capable of distinguishing between those kinds of knowledge that are necessary and those that are not.[10] This is a controversial claim, because

[9] This is the incipit of the treatise *Meditationes piissimae de cognitione humanae conditionis* ("Pious Meditations on the Understanding of the Human Condition"), a work that most often went under Bernard's name. I will analyze it in detail in Chapters Two and Three.

[10] There are Bernardine analogues for this emphasis on need, as when in the first sermon on Advent he says that Christ came "not at the beginning of time or at its midpoint, but at its end. This is done not inappropriately; on the contrary, Wisdom wisely arranged that help should first be brought when the need was great" ("non in initio, non in medio temporis, sed in fine. Nec incongrue factum est, sed vere sapienter disposuit Sapientia, ut cum magis esset necessarium, tunc primo ferret auxilium"), emphasizing that "We were the ones in need" ("Nostra enim necessitas erat") (1.8-9; IV:167), or when, in his third sermon on Palm Sunday, he exclaims, "Great is his need, the need for

Langland's Nede is a controversial figure. Nede speaks only in the final passus of the B- and C-Texts of *Piers Plowman*, appearing just before the arrival of Antichrist and the apparent unraveling of the Church's "Unite." Its appearance has consistently baffled critics. Jill Mann and Robert Adams are the crucial voices in what constitute, respectively, the "pro-Nede" and "anti-Nede" critical camps, into which most readings of the poem fall.[11] Following Mann, the former group tends to emphasize the importance of physical and spiritual neediness for the whole poem, and so the positive priority of Nede's appearance in the final passus for our interpretations of *Piers* as a whole; the latter, on the other hand, emphasizes the apparent un-orthodoxy of several of Nede's statements, including a radical inversion of the hierarchy of the virtues—Nede places temperance, traditionally last, at the top of the list—and, in a twist unique to Adams, the at least plausible identification of Nede with the "egestas" ("need") that is said, in Job Chapter 41 in the Vulgate, to precede Leviathan, and that was generally understood, following Gregory the Great, as a kind of allegory of Antichrist. These latter critics therefore dismiss Nede as a figure for a malign and even diabolical temptation. Positing an ambivalent middle way, James Simpson has described Nede as a "matter of great intellectual tension" for Langland (*Piers Plowman* 205-6)—a place where the poet's inability to resolve the problems of the active life versus the contemplative, evangelical poverty and the lifestyle of the wandering writer-hermit versus the more stable life of the cloister, is concentrated into a final, self-lacerating reproach. Nede "afrounted me foule and faytour me calde" (C.XXII.5), Will reports at the beginning of Nede's appearance in the poem's final passus, and he is given no opportunity to answer Nede's charges against him; he simply swoons and falls asleep again.

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their salvation" ("Magnum opus, opus salutis") with regard to Christ's need for mankind's salvation (3.3; V:53). But Langland's use of the term is strikingly original.

[11] Jill Mann's "The Nature of Need Revisited" provides a helpful roster of the impressively evenly matched literary critical teams in question (5).

In contrast both with Simpson's proposed irresolution and with those critics who sort themselves into one or the other critical camp, I will argue that Langland does indeed attempt to resolve the tension represented by Nede—but only in the sense that he attempts to inhabit it, straining to represent and affirm the "eschatological tension" that Rowan Williams sees as peculiarly elided in the crusading work of St. Bernard. Nede's functioning, as Richard Firth Green puts it, as both "apocalyptic sign" and "redemptive principle" at the same time ("Nede ne hath" 26), is the only answer the poem gives to its own most fundamental questions, a "sign of contradiction" that, rather than offering "discursive, rational access" to some kind of once-and-for-all answer to its protagonist's and poet's personal and intellectual concerns, obscurely relays to its reader an experience of tempered hopefulness through an awareness and experience of one's own fundamental neediness. For *Piers Plowman*, it is only in terms of this experience, and not by way of any intellectual scheme—"*Sciencie appetitus hominem immortalitatis gloriam spoliauit*"—that the question of "*quam oportet sapere*" can finally be answered.

It has perhaps not been sufficiently noted by recent critics that Bernard himself—however much he may have traveled "In abite as an heremite vnholy of werkes"—was also a master of personal and ecclesiastical self-critique. The twelfth-century movement toward greater strictness in the observance of the Benedictine rule, of which he was the most famous advocate, arose at least in part from the conviction that he was himself living in an age of shocking hypocrisy and rampant covetousness at the highest levels of the church, threatening to render the Christian community of his day a diabolic parody of its Gospel commitments.[12] Bernard was

[12] This is most dramatically, and hyperbolically, illustrated in Bernard's *Apologia ad Guillelmum*, written against what he saw as the decadent practices of the monks at Cluny. Conrad Rudolph's *The "Things of Greater Importance"* provides a lengthy analysis of the treatise, which he describes as "the most important source we have today for an understanding of the actual medieval attitude toward art as it functioned in society" (3-4). The theme is also developed at length in the sermon I will describe and analyze below, where Bernard locates the Church of his day firmly in the age of hypocrisy at its highest pitch. It is worth noting, however, that—as in the *Apologia*—

also, as a close reading of his thirty-third sermon on the Song of Songs will make clear, himself an unparalleled master of what Williams calls "eschatological tension." He is himself torn between the requirements of a Christendom at times lacking in something like eschatological perspective—a Christendom to which he nonetheless owed his full obedience, having had to be persuaded at great length both of the Templars' foundation and of the Second Crusade's initiation that it was his duty to support them, and having apparently never questioned these pursuits once he was persuaded that this was so—and his own evident attunement to the fact of the church's, and the soul's, necessarily existing for now in an anagogical interval in which they are both mysteriously present in the world, and yet in some sense not to be fully realized until the arrival of the eschatological Kingdom.[13]

To this extent I agree with Williams, if I would not go so far as Aers: Bernard will discard "eschatological tension" when it suits him, or rather when he feels bound to as a matter of obedience. And yet at the same time it must be remembered that he is his generation's great advocate for a whole dimension of thought that was, as he greatly feared and as was perhaps responsible for his occasionally hysterical tone in the affairs of Peter Abelard and Gilbert of Poitiers, rapidly disappearing.[14] This is the dimension of thought that I have described in my

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Bernard often seems to suggest that the Cistercian Order (and perhaps the Cistercian Order alone) is exempt from this specific critique (Lawrence 168).

[13] It is hard to restrict the location of this latter sensibility to any one particular passage, as it permeates the whole of the *Sermones super cantica canticorum* and much else of Bernard's work. M.B. Pranger describes Bernard's view of "life as ritual failure" (*Bernard of Clairvaux* 26). Along similar lines, Julia Kristeva writes of love in Bernardine theology: "Indeed, governed by the higher inclination toward the good and toward God, our fallen nature yet remains rebellious. Without that resistance we would not have needed the *holy violence* that constitutes love in order to reach the ideal. Without it Christianity would be a philosophy of the good, eventually a rationalism, not this passion of the body wrenching itself—which is called love" (166). My reading of the thirty-third sermon will, I hope, bring out this dimension of Bernard's thought more clearly.

[14] Emero Stiegman describes Bernard's reputation as a "reactionary obscurantist" in these confrontations as "a partisan construct," and yet perhaps "history's revenge for the undeserved image of his opponents that he himself projected, in the acrimonious style that was Christendom's traditional dialogue with 'heretics': they were rationalists devoid of faith." Bernard's "deepest concerns" in these debates, Stiegman believes, must be sought in terms of "what disturbed him as a contemplative monk"—the concern, for instance, that if faith is held "as the best available hypothesis, an opinion – an *aestimatio* (or *existimatio*, as Abelard said)," then "reason becomes the final arbiter, and

Introduction in terms of anagogy, and that I have discussed so far in this chapter with respect to Bernard's category of "experience" and Langland's figure of "Nede." A closer look at Bernard's anagogical imagination in action will make it easier to make sense of Langland's own eventual recourse, at the end of both B- and C-Texts of *Piers Plowman*, to the language of neediness. Identified in the *Middle English Dictionary* not just with necessity (2), but also and more frequently with desire (1a), lack (1b), poverty (1c), and with sexual desire (1f) and the relief of bodily needs such as urination and defecation in particular (1g), "nede" is a word marked by a generative ambiguity that, in its capacity to encompass both the bare needs of the body and the strict necessities of metaphysical speculation, promises to bridge some of the distance between here and the hereafter, the "now" and the "not yet" of anagogical time**.** Bernard of Clairvaux, to whom Langland's Liberum Arbitrium refers in his reflections on the dangers of superfluous knowledge and the consequent need to establish what it is that one really needs to know now, provides both an obviously influential analogue, and a direct, eliciting influence, on Langland's decision to have recourse to this prolifically ambiguous figure.

The Chimaera of Time: Noon in Bernard's Thirty-third sermon on the Song of Songs

Bernard's eschatological genius is made abundantly clear in his thirty-third sermon on the Song of Songs, a masterwork of anagogical perspective both personal and ecclesiastical and one of the great commentaries on the symbolism of noontide in the *Song* and in the Psalms. The sermon begins with a fugue of prayerful voices:

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the monk's mystical ascent loses its grounding" ("Bernard of Clairvaux" 132). Constant J. Mews describes Leclercq's analysis of these confrontations in terms of "two distinct systems of schooling in the medieval world, one clerical . . . the other monastic," but ultimately disagrees with Leclercq's neat dichotomy, emphasizing instead the extent to which Bernard "was simply not interested in the critique of theological language" and "had no particular expertise in such a discussion of words" (166). Stiegman's "mystical ascent" hypothesis resonates more with my reading: even if Bernard did not understand what was being gained in the schools, he understood what was in danger of being lost.

> "Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you pasture your flock, where you make it to lie down at noon." But another voice, that of Job, says: "Tell me why you judge me like this?" This man does not complain of the judgement, he merely queries its cause, seeking to gain knowledge from his afflictions rather than be destroyed by them. Still another man made a similar request: "Make your ways known to me, O Lord, teach me your paths." What he means by paths he reveals in another text: "He leads me in the path of righteousness." Therefore the man who longs for God does not cease to seek these three things, righteousness, judgment, and the place where the Bridegroom dwells in glory: the path in which he walks, the wariness with which he walks, and the home to which he walks.
>
> ("Indica mihi, quem diligit anima mea, ubi pascas, ubi cubes in meridie. Et alius quidem: Indica, inquit, mihi cur me ita iudices. Ubi non sane sententiam causatur, sed scrutatur causam, erudiri flagellis petens, non erui. Item alius precatur, dicens: Vias tuas, Domine, demonstra mihi, et semitas tuas edoce me. Quas dixerit semitas, manifestat alibi: Deduxit me, inquiens, super semitas iustitiae. Ergo tria ista anima curiosa Dei non cessat inquirere, iustitiam, ed iudicium, et locum habitationis gloriae sponsi, tamquam viam in qua ambulet, cautelam qua ambulet, et ad quam ambulet mansionem.") (33.1; I:233-4)

The first voice is, of course, the voice of the bride in the Song of Songs; this is Bernard's third consecutive sermon discussing this single verse: "Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you pasture your flock, where you make it to lie down at noon" (Song of Songs 1.6).[15] The second is the voice of Job, asking God to explain the reasons for his suffering; and the third is the voice of

[15] All references to the Bible are to the Vulgate. As in this case, where I am citing Bernard citing scripture, I have used my translation of Bernard's citation, following the Cistercian Fathers series. In other cases, I have provided my own literal translations of the Vulgate text.

the Psalmist, asking to be taught the ways of righteousness. Bernard's first rhetorical move is to knit these three voices together, depicting them as three harmonizing registers in which the desire of the "man who longs for God" is expressed; Bernard strikes them all at once, together, as a kind of chord. He goes on to characterize the three things sought from God in terms of three corresponding virtues that are given to the bride who seeks them: "loveliness from the habit of righteousness, prudence from her knowledge of judgments, and chastity from her desire for the presence or glory of her Bridegroom" ("de forma iustitiae sit Formosa, de iudiciorum notitia cauta, de desiderio praesentiae seu gloriae sponsi casta") (33.1; I:234). These are the gifts requested by a spiritual love, Bernard says, as opposed to a carnal. This is why the bride says "not simply, 'whom I love,' but 'O you whom my soul loves,' thereby indicating that her love is spiritual" ("non simpliciter: quem diligo, sed: O, inquit, quem diligit anima mea, spiritualem designans dilectionem") (33.2; I:234).

The bride in this passage—who is, first and foremost, the soul, although she will turn out also to be a figure for the Church—is characterized fundamentally by her desire; structurally, she is a kind of beggar. Even her virtues, Bernard stresses, are properly not her own; they are "gifts" received. We are a long way from the exposition of the noonday demon and of the fourfold scheme of the temptations of the soul and of the church at the end of the sermon, but we are nonetheless already offered a kind of doubly threefold interpretative schema, which might be fruitfully compared both with the scheme of the four cardinal virtues and also with Henri de Lubac's fourfold sense of scripture. Bernard is in effect here describing a threefold interpretation of the bride's desire, which acts as a kind of literal sense subject to rigorous allegorical interpretation: "the man who longs for God," whose desire this sermon is meant to make legible for us. Interpreting this fundamental datum, Bernard first describes a righteousness that asks,

"Make your ways known to me, O Lord," which might be fairly compared with the allegorical or Christological sense of the received teachings of the faith and of the life of Christ, and which is said to issue in the virtue of prudence. He next describes a faculty of judgment that asks to "gain knowledge from his afflictions," issuing in a kind of moral "loveliness" that might be fairly compared with the tropological sense's emphasis on how exactly one is to act on what one has understood, and with the virtue of fortitude. Lastly, and most enigmatically, Bernard arrives at "the place where the Bridegroom dwells in glory," which is known on earth only in terms of the "desire" for itself that it generates, and that issues in the distinctively Bernardine and Cistercian virtue of "chastity." It is this final comparison that has the greatest bearing on my argument about *Piers Plowman*, and that is of the most importance for the sermon itself: the implicit connection between "the place where the Bridegroom dwells in glory," apprehended here only by "desire"; the fourth of de Lubac's fourfold senses of scripture, the anagogical sense; and a "chastity" that looks very much like the virtue of temperance as it is described by Langland's Nede.[16]

[16] This is of course more than Bernard says. The description of the virtues he offers to the Cistercian Pope Eugenius III in his treatise *De Consideratione* ("On Consideration"), however, also significantly prioritizes temperance, without explicitly inverting the hierarchy Aquinas would later describe in more detail. In a passage that would serve as a good gloss on Nede's speech, Bernard blurs the boundary between prudence and temperance: "Prudence is the mean of desire and necessity. . . .In this way it forms a third virtue called temperance. Consideration judges intemperate both the man who obstinately denies himself necessities and the man who indulges in excess. Thus, temperance is not only the rejection of what is excessive, but also the acceptance of what is necessary" ("Haec (prudentia) item est, quae inter voluptates et necessitates media . . . et sic . . . tertiam formans virtutem, quam dicunt temperantiam. Nempe intemperantem ipsa consideratio censet, tam eum, qui necessariis pertinaciter demit, quam qui indulget superfluis. Non est ergo temperantia in solis resecandis superfluis: est et in admittendis necessariis") (VIII.9; III:404). G.R. Evans writes of this passage, and of virtue in the *De Consideratione* more generally: "The connection of justice with temperance is through the will. Unless the will is under control (by consideration), it will not refrain from excess and then it will not be able to give the other person his just desserts. Unless the will is thus 'tempered', it may go too far in justice, for it is possible to be excessively just by being excessively severe (Ecclesiastes 7.17). . . .[Bernard] argues for a 'mean' which is both proper to each virtue and uniformly and fully shared by all." Although it is ultimately prudence that is identified as the "virtue which is the discoverer of this mean" (*Bernard of Clairvaux* 134)—in Bernard's terms, "the mean of desire and necessity"—this emphasis on the centrality of moderation and the mean for all the cardinal virtues is nonetheless clearly reminiscent of what Nede says about the priority of temperance with respect to real need. *Piers* itself, in the persons of the "vicory," lord, and king, already suggests the fragility and manipulability of the three cardinal virtues other than temperance that Nede himself criticizes. One should not mistake the obvious point that Langland's lord abuses fortitude, for the more

Robert Adams identifies this sermon as a direct or indirect source for *Piers*,[17] and aligns the "lewed vicory," the lord, and the King who appear in the poem's penultimate passus both with perversions of the first three cardinal virtues, and with a fourfold scheme of church history adduced by Bernard at the end of the sermon ("Some Versions of Apocalypse" 206).[18] In any case, long before Bernard enters into any speculations on the stages of church history, he first takes care to provoke the desire of his listeners for the three virtues he has described as characterizing "the man who longs for God." He recommends, "Nor must you overlook the reference to the hour of noon, nor above all that she looks for a place where he who feeds the flock also lies down, a sign of great security. . . .Happy the place in which the sheep move in and out at will, and there is no one to frighten them!" ("Sed nec illud praetereat te de hora meridiana, et quod is potissimum exploratur locus, in quo qui pascit, cubat simul, quod est magnae securitatis indicium. . . .Felix regio, in qua pro libitu oves ingrediuntur et egrediuntur, et non est qui exterreat!") (33.2; I:234). Langland's Dreamer, of course, sets out dressed in "shroudes as Y a shep were" (C.Prol.2), and *Piers Plowman* itself seems to exist emphatically in that interval of unfulfilled, expectant desire that Bernard describes as that place where noon has not yet come, the flock may not yet lie down, and "no matter how great the effusion of the Spirit that enriches these, the husk of the sacrament is not received with the same pleasure as the fat of the wheat, nor is faith the equivalent of vision, nor memory of presence, nor time of eternity, nor a face of its reflection, nor the image of God of a slave's condition" ("quantalibet sane abundantia Spiritus

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controversial suggestion that Nede abuses fortitude by ranking it lower than temperance. The former precisely motivates the latter. Likewise, it is the lewed vicory himself who declares, "For *Spirtus prudencie* among the peple is gyle / And al tho fayre vertues as vises thei semeth" (C.XXI.455-6). The critique of prudence that begins this fourfold satirical scheme in the poem has a spokesperson who is acutely aware of the failure he perhaps also embodies.

[17] Margaret Goldsmith also makes this connection in her article "Piers' Apples" (320-1).

[18] As Adams implies, this is not the same as claiming Bernard as a direct source. It is, however, only "among the exegeses of St. Bernard's disciples" that the Augustinian four-stage model of church history was brought into explicit conversation with the otherwise separate schema of the four cardinal virtues ("The Nature of Need" 300).

pinguescant ista, non pari omnino iucunditate sumitur cortex sacramenti et adeps frumenti, fides et species, memoria et praesentia, aeternitas et tempus, vultus et speculum, imago Dei et forma servi") (33.3; I:235). It would be hard to imagine a more dramatic description and even enactment of "eschatological tension" than this passage's litany of dichotomies between the "now" and the "not yet" of anagogical temporality. Bombarding his listener with accounts of the "safe dwelling-place" of "Paradise," the "sweet nourishment" of the "Word," and the "wealth beyond calculation" of "eternity" ("Tuta habitatio paradisus, dulce pabulum Verbum, opulentia multa nimis aeternitas") (33.2; I:235)—and subsequently insisting that these things only exist for us now in terms of their being longed for—Bernard opens up a kind of interval of expectation and even abjection in the sermon, a gap between the now and the hereafter, time and eternity, memory and presence, that must be left indefinitely open for now, suffered with the aid of Bernardine "chastity" on the way to the "home to which he walks."

This point is emphatically restated with reference to the person of Stephen, the first martyr of the church, "one of your little sheep," upon whose death Christ was said to stand up from his throne in heaven (Acts 7.55). Even Stephen was not spared the experience of abjection: "You feed your flock therefore, and at the same time make them rest, but not here below" ("Ergo et pascis, et cubas pariter, sed non hic") (33.4; I:236). In a characteristically Bernardine twist, this somewhat grim observation immediately opens up more space for prayerful desire: "And so I beseech you," he repeats, "'show me where you pasture your flock, where you make it lie down at noon,' that is, the whole day long: for that noon is a day that knows no evening" ("Et propterea, quaeso, Indica mihi ubi pascas, ubi cubes in meridie, hoc est tota die: etenim illa meridies tota est dies, et ipsa nesciens vesperam") (33.4; I:236). Just as noon transforms abruptly here into a figure for all of eternity, tantalizingly conceived in terms both of the anagogical

now—the *invisibilia* of de Lubac, where eternity already interpenetrates time—and of the eschatological not yet—de Lubac's *futura*, the future things at the end of time—Bernard shifts gears again, throwing us back into the past, where the life and death and resurrection of Christ laid the allegorical foundation on which his whole interpretive schema is built. The noonday's sun "never sets" ("nescit occasum"), Bernard says; "But perhaps it had a sunrise, when that sanctified day first dawned upon us through the tender mercy of our God, in which the Rising Sun visited us from heaven" ("At matutinum forsitan habuit, cum primum videlicet dies sanctificatus illuxit nobis, per viscera utique misericordiae Dei nostri, in quibus visitavit nos Oriens ex alto"). "How many prophets and kings desired to see this, and did not see it!" ("Quanti reges et prophetae voluerunt videre, et non viderunt!") (33.4; I:236), he exclaims—thus closing the interval of desire, if only for a moment, with the sunrise appearance of Christ. And yet this interval is immediately once again re-opened, and with greater force, "because it was still only the dawn, and the beginning, or rather a token of the coming day, for the Sun concealed its rays rather than shed them over all the earth" ("eo quod aurora esset et initium, vel potius indicium diei, dum Sol adhuc absconderet radios suos, et minime eos spargeret super terram") (33.5; I:236). "The dawn, then," Bernard observes, "and a quite clouded one at that, was the whole life of Christ upon earth, which remained obscure until he died and rose again" ("Erat ergo aurora, et ipsa subobscura satis, tota illa videlicet Christi conversatio super terram, usque dum occumbens et rursum exoriens") (33.6; I:237). With the resurrection of Christ we finally reach sunrise—both literally and figuratively since, as Bernard reminds us, the women who found him are said to have come to the tomb just after dawn (Matt. 28.1, Luke 24.1)—and with it "a new beauty, with a more serene light than usual" ("novum . . . decorem, et sereniorem solito lucem") (33.6; I:237). This light has only grown, it seems, in the time since: "Since then the Sun has risen indeed, and

has gradually poured down its rays over the earth; its light has begun to appear increasingly clearer, its warmth to be more perceptible" ("Sane ex tunc elevatus est sol, et sensim demum infundens suos radios super terram, coepit paulatim clarior apparere fervidiorque sentiri") (33.6; I:237). The resurrection, ascension, and sending of the Holy Spirit, it seems, have made possible this gradual and irresistible brightening.

This metaphorical treatment of Christ's coming in terms of the sunrise in itself represents a whole panoramic vision of history, and one that seems at least to complicate the fourfold Augustinian scheme to which Bernard will later commit himself. This first schema's insistence on the only partial light of Christ's first coming implies a more or less straightforwardly progressive understanding of the way Christian history works: Jesus's resurrection represented a sunrise of which we are still only, at least in Bernard's twelfth century, beginning to see the late morning consequences. Of course, by now we perhaps recognize the pattern: Bernard is about to undercut this concretely optimistic suggestion, and from multiple directions. First, he returns his listener to the eschatological interval of hope: "However, even though it increases in warmth and strength, though it multiplies and extends its rays over the whole course of our mortal lives—for it will be with us even to the end of the world—it will not attain to its noontide splendor, nor be seen here below in that fullness that it will exhibit hereafter, for those who are deemed worthy of this vision" ("Verum, quantumlibet incalescat, invalescat, multiplicet et dilatet radios suos per omni huius nostrae mortalitatis curriculum, —erit enim nobiscum usque ad consummationem saeculi—, non tamen ad meridianum perveniet lumen, nec in illa sui plenitudine videbitur modo, in qua videndus est postea, ab his dumtaxat quos hac visione ipse dignabitur") (33.6; I:237). Next, addressing Christ directly, Bernard firmly re-situates his listener in the space of prayer, and so of unfulfilled desire:

> O true noontide, fullness of warmth and light, trysting-place of the sun. . . .Show me this place, [the bride] said, where there is so much brightness and peace and fullness, so that, just as Jacob while still in this life saw the Lord face to face and his soul was saved, or as Moses saw him, not by means of images and obscure saying or through dreams . . . so may I too merit the ecstatic grace of contemplating you in your light and beauty, as you generously feed your flock and make them rest securely.
>
> ("O vere meridies, plenitudo fervoris et lucis, solis statio. . . .Hunc locum, inquit, tantae claritatis, et pacis, et plenitudinis, indica mihi, ut quemadmodum Iacob adhuc in corpore manens vidit Dominum facie ad faciem et salva facta est anima eius, vel certe sicut Moyses vidit eum, non per figuras et aenigmata seu per somnia . . . ita ego quoque te in lumine tuo et in decore tuo per mentis excessum merear contemplari pascentem uberius, quiescentem securius.") (33.6; I:237-8)

In the wake of this prayer, Bernard begins now to explicitly thematize the frustrating cycle of approach and rebuff, advance and retreat, presence and absence it characterizes, lamenting again: "Here on earth too, you feed your sheep but not to their full satisfaction. . . .You call me blessed when I hunger and thirst for righteousness. But what is this in comparison with the happiness of those who are filled with the good things of your house, who feast and rejoice in the sight of the Lord, who delight with joy?" ("Nam et hic pascis, sed non in saturitate. . . .Beatam me dicis, cum esurio et sitio iustitiam. Quid hoc ad illorum felicitatem, qui repleti sunt in bonis domus tuae, qui epulantur et exsultant in conspectu Domini, et delectantur in laetitia?") (33.7; I:238). Here Bernard modulates himself into a humbler, "needier" vein: "To eat is pleasurable, but one does not eat in security if fear is present. To suffer and feast simultaneously is surely a bitter pleasure? All things here below fall short of perfection, many are beyond the reach of my desires, and

nothing is safe" ("Et pasci certe, ubi timeas pati, iucunditatem habet, sed non securitatem. Porro autem pati et pasci simul, nonne molesta iucunditas est? Omnia mihi hic cedunt citra perfectum, plura praeter votum, et tutum nihil"). With this seemingly bewildered reflection, the saint arrives again at once at another tantalizing node of hope: "When will you fill me with the joy of your presence? Lord I do seek your face. Your face is the noontide" ("Quando adimplebis me laetitia cum vultu tuo? Vultum tuum, Domine, requiram. Vultus tuus meridies est") (33.7; I:238).

The disarmingly simple identification of the "noontide" with the face of Christ represents the anagogical axis of the sermon, around which the whole rest of it turns. With the invocation of the bridegroom's "face," Bernard arrives at a kind of prefiguring fulfillment of desire, an image that arrests—if only for an instant—the anxious quest for the noontide pasture. As if to underscore this point and lengthen this pause, Bernard returns immediately to his scriptural refrain: "'Tell me where you pasture your flock, where you make it lie down at noon" ("Indica mihi ubi pascas, ubi cubes in meridie") (33.7; I:238). In the wake of this crystallization of the bride's desire, a new register begins to open up in Bernard's discourse—a more nearly confessional vein, which testifies to the speaker's own experience more specifically than the sharply rhetorical laments that have preceded it:

> I do wish to know where that pasturage is at noon. For during my time in this life, in this my place of pilgrimage, I am accustomed to feed and be fed under your protection, in the Law and the Prophets and the Psalms, in the meadows of the Gospels . . . and often I have done my utmost to beg food for myself and those belonging to me from the doings of the saints, from their words and writings. More often, however, because this was the closer at hand, I have eaten the bread of pain and drunk the wine of sorrow, 'my tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me continually: "Where is your God?"' My one

> hope is your table . . . from which I receive by favor of your mercy all that I need for refreshment when I feel sad and inwardly disturbed. This is the pasture that I have known . . . but tell me also about those secret places that I do not know.
>
> ("scire velim ubi in meridie pascas. Nam in tempore quidem mortalitatis meae et in loco peregrinationis meae, consuevi sane sub tua custodia pasci et pascere, in Lege et Prophetis et Psalmis, necnon et evangelicis pascuis . . . frequenter etiam de gestis sanctorum, et verbis et scriptis eorum, victum mihi atque attinentibus mihi mendicavi ut potui; frequentius autum, quoniam is magis ad manum fuit, manducavi panem doloris et vinum compunctionis bibi, et Factae sunt mihi lacrimae meae panes die ac nocte, dum dicitur mihi quotidie: Ubi est Deus tuus? Nisi quod de mensa tua . . . de ipsa, inquam, tuae quidem beneficio miserationis accipio, in quo utcumque respiro, quotiens tristis est anima mea et quotiens conturbat me. Haec pascua novi . . . sed indica mihi, quaeso, etiam quae non novi.") (33.7; I:238-9)

Threaded throughout the sermon, the prayerful voice of the Psalmist returns with force in this passage, stitched together as it is from four different references to the Psalms. It is a paradigmatic example of what Robert of Basevorn called Bernardine "inculcation," threading citations together to make something entirely new. Bernard uses this method to settle for a time into a Psalmic register of longing and loving address, and his request now tacitly admits that he has everything he really needs; only he wishes it were not so intermixed with sorrow. This comparatively stable stance of humbled prayer seems to open up the way now for the speaker to address the world around him, snapping him out of his long reverie of frustrated desire and only ever momentarily glimpsed attainment. Now—in the second half of the sermon, which roughly follows the elliptical vision of the "face" of Christ, the true "noontide"—Bernard begins to make

something like practical requests and even exhortations, warning his listeners of the false prophets who capture the imaginations of the "wanderers" ("vagi") at dusk, and who are "always learning," yet never attaining to "knowledge of the truth" ("semper discentes, et numquam ad scientiam Veritatis pervenientes") (33.8; I:239).[19] And yet the humbling lesson of the first half of the sermon remains here, practically applied: "I say emphatically, we must also yearn for that noontide, so that in its clear light we may detect the tricks of the devil. . . .For we cannot defend ourselves against the noontide devil except with the aid of noontide light" ("inquam, et maxime, videtur mihi illa meridies optanda etiam nobis, ut clara luce deprehendamus astutias diaboli. . . .Non enim aliter nos custodire sufficimus ab incursu et daemonio meridiano, nisi in meridiano aeque lumine") (33.9; I:239-40). The tense longing deliberately generated by the first half of the sermon is, it seems, the only sure way to guard oneself against the temptations described in the sermon's second half.

The doggedly paradoxical quality of Bernard's thought returns here again. He has just spent half of a long, rhetorically overstuffed sermon celebrating and longing for the noontide light of eternity, of presence, of the face of Christ. And yet now, just when we have entered into the plane of practical day to day existence, we are abruptly warned of the noontide devil at dusk,

[19] Here, and for perhaps the first time in the sermon, Bernard recognizably inhabits something like the stern, self-critical pragmatism by which he was to become, for the late Middle Ages in Middle English, the paradigmatic spokesperson for a certain kind of moral perfectionism. The peculiar amalgam of authentic and inauthentically Bernardine texts that made up this figure, evidently important for *Piers Plowman*—especially the C-Text's Passus XVI, discussed above—and for other popular works of Middle English literature, such as the *Prick of Conscience*, has been thoroughly discussed with reference to *Piers* by Joseph Wittig in his study, '"Piers Plowman' B, Passus IX-XII: Elements in the Design of the Inward Journey." I will discuss this tradition at much greater length in Chapters Two and Three. The Cistercian treatise *De spiritu et anima*, which often circulated with this material and which in itself combines authentically Bernardine material (including citations of the *Sermones super cantica canticorum*) with Pseudo-Bernardine citations, comforts its reader near its conclusion: "Do not wonder that many seem in need, for this is a place of need. As the Prophet says in the Psalm, 'My soul thirsts for you, my flesh longs after you'" (287). This treatise is cited in my Works Cited in McGinn's edition. The question of how and why (and to what end) this anagogical register was sifted out of the Bernardine corpus on its way into the vernacular will be one of the major questions of Chapter Three. *Piers*, of course, resists this sifting; Langland reconstructs the language of anagogical fulfillment in his own idiom, the language of "nede."

and of the grim possibility that "wicked spirits . . . for the purpose of deceiving man, can become bright as day, even as noon" ("aliqui de numero malignorum . . . se ad fallendum simulare noverunt, nec modo diem, sed meridiem") (33.9; I:240). That inaccessible noontide pasture that seemed, even its inaccessibility, to act as a kind of North Star to the desires of all those who long for God, suddenly becomes here at least potentially only a false north. Launching ourselves out now into something like Langland's "fair field full of folk," we are at once confronted with the possibility that all we have desired so far will only deceive us in the end, for "when this kind of noontide devil sets out to tempt a man, there is no chance whatever of parrying him; he will tempt and overthrow his victim by suggesting what appears to be good, by persuading him, unsuspecting and unprepared as he is, to commit evil under the guise of good" ("forte aliquod istiusmodi daemonium meridianum tentandum acceperit . . . non poterit omnino caveri, sed tentabit et supplantabit sine dubio sub specie boni, pro bono scilicet malum incauto et improvideo persuadens")—"unless," that is, "the Sun from heaven shines into his heart with noontide brightness" ("nisi cordi illius . . . Oriens ex alto illuxerit velut meridies") (33.9; I:240).

Once again, and now on the plane of personal spiritual struggle and temptation, we are saved only by a kind of hypothetical "unless"—an interval of desire, or "eschatological tension," that renders salvation possible only in the abandonment of ourselves to something like our own un-savability,[20] our willingness to inhabit the suspended longing for a noonday vision of Christ that will arrive in its entirety only in the hereafter and "not here below." Otherwise, as Bernard is

[20] Giorgio Agamben writes, in a somewhat polemically hope-prioritizing reading of St. Paul's phrase "In hope we are saved," "What does [love] hope for? Does it hope to be satisfied? Not really, since hope and the imagination are essentially linked with something unsatisfiable. This is the case not because they do not desire to obtain their object, but because, insofar as it is imagined and hoped for, their desire is always already satisfied. Saint Paul's claim that 'in hope we are saved '(Romans 8.24) is therefore both correct and incorrect. If the object of hope is that which cannot be satisfied, it is only as unsavable—that is, as already saved—that we have hoped for salvation" (*The Adventure* 90-1). Bernard would probably have found this to be a bridge too far, but its hyperbole effectively corrects for the absence of an element that has been too often lost in the tradition: the "already-ness" of the anagogical *invisibilia*.

quick to warn us, we will be tempted to pin our salvation on our own efforts. More specifically, and perhaps more specially pertaining to Bernard's monastic audience, we will be tempted to identify our own particular moralistic or otherwise ascetical program with the eschatological aim of our existence—like the monk who gets up before his brothers only to find himself sleeping through communal prayer, or the similarly misguided monk who prolongs his fast only to become "so weak that he is useless for the service of God" ("ut divinis obsequiis eo inutilem redderet, quo imbecillem"), or, perhaps more relevant to Langland's Will, the isolationist monk who "lives as a hermit in order to achieve perfection, until the unhappy man finally discovers how true that saying is that he had read to no purpose: 'Woe to him who is alone, for when he falls he has none to lift him up!'" ("quasi obtentu maioris puritatis eremum petere persuasit, et cognoverunt miseri tandem quam verus sit sermo quem frustra legerant: Vae soli, quoniam si cecedierit, non habet sublevantem") (33.10; I:240). Somewhat like Langland's Nede, who is so greatly exasperated by Will's resistance to the idea of simply taking "no more than nede the tauhte" (C.XXII.9), Bernard laments in particular the habits of over-zealous monks who, having "once stubbornly refused what was necessary," "now insistently demand what is superfluous" ("importune superflua quaeritare qui prius necessaria obstinatissime recusabant")—thus forging "a degrading alliance . . . with those bodies on which they had previously waged a cruel warfare" ("turpe iniere foedus cum corporibus suis, quibus crudele ante indixerant bellum") (33.10; I:240). This oscillating intemperance, Bernard warns, makes it impossible for these monks to "dwell in one custom together" ("habitare . . . unius moris") with their brother monks (33.10; I:241), ultimately impacting negatively on what Langland might have called their "Unite."

In line with this implicit theme of temperance,[21] and with his more explicit theme of "chastity," Bernard pauses to reassure his listener that he does not mean, at the expense of the fastidious, "to encourage the gluttonous" ("frena laxare gulosis") (33.10; I:241). To demonstrate that this is so, he provides a fourfold schema of all temptation whatsoever, a kind of catch-all guide to all the hurdles faced by all monks, whether gluttonous or otherwise. Drawing, as Augustine did before him,[22] on Psalm 91.6—"His truth will surround you with a shield: you will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness, nor the invasion of the noontide devil" ("Circumdabit te veritas eius: non timebis a timore nocturno, a sagitta volante in die, a negotio perambulante in tenebris, ab incursu et daemonio meridiano")—Bernard succinctly identifies the terror of the night with "adversity" ("adversa"), especially where "the reward for which we are prepared to suffer adversity is not yet revealed to us" ("propter quod adversa pati aggredimur, id nondum revelatum est") because our failure to perceive those rewards precludes, in our present darkness, the "desire" ("desiderio") that would otherwise "render all fear as nothing" ("timor omnino quorumvis nullus esset") (33.11; I:241); the arrow that flies by day with a debasing desire for the praise of others, "which is vainglory" ("quae est inanis gloria"); the pestilence of the darkness with "hypocrisy" ("hypocrisis") which "has its source in ambition, its dwelling in darkness: for it conceals what it really is. . . .Active at all times, it retains the appearance of piety as a mask to hide behind" ("de ambitione descendit, et in tenebris habitatio eius: quippe abscondit quod est. . . .Negotiatur autem omni tempore, formam retinens pietatis ad sese occultandum") (33.12; I:242); and the noontide

[21] This passage of the sermon is broadly resonant with Bernard's discussion of temperance in his *De Consideratione*, in a passage cited at Footnote 16 above.

[22] In his *Enarrationes in psalmos*, Augustine in fact interprets "noon-day" as "the heat of a furious persecution." He simply inaugurates the tradition of tying the passage specifically to the history of the church, which he outlines only in terms of a two-stage persecution—one by day and one, more difficult to resist, by night (91.8). Bernard's elaboration is extensive and original, and demonstrably closer to what *Piers Plowman* appears to be doing.

devil himself with a more mysterious, last-ditch demonic endeavor to "seduce . . . by means of a counterfeit good" ("falso bono supplantare") the otherwise saintly, "laying ambushes for the perfect" ("insidiari perfectis") (33.13; I:242). And yet, perhaps surprisingly, this last temptation's capacity for deception is illustrated not with recourse to famous examples of counterfeit goods and devilish ambushes laid for the holy, but instead with reference to the passing, ultimately mistaken anxieties of the patriarchs, saints, and apostles: Mary is perturbed by the angel Gabriel's greeting because she fears some deception, an incredulous Joshua has to verify for himself that the angel who greets him is in fact an angel, and the apostles cry out in fear when they see Christ walking on the water toward their boat. "Was not this cry of fear," Bernard asks of the apostles' exclamation, "a sign that they clearly thought him to be the noontide devil?" ("clamarent prae timore, nonne apertam meridiani suspicionem daemonii praetenderunt?") (33.13; I:243).

These are all, of course, great examples of righteousness, biblical figures who approximate as much as anyone else the desire of Bernard's bride who "longs for God." They are also, therefore, people whose purported anxiety over the noontide devil ultimately proves to be entirely unwarranted. This implies a somewhat portentous question for Bernard's listener: does fearing the noontide devil with the fear he deserves necessarily mean risking the tragic mis-recognition of the angel Gabriel, or of Joshua's "commander of the army of the Lord," (Joshua 5.14), or even of Jesus Christ himself, as a demon? "He who was the true noontide," Bernard is quick to assure us, "made himself known to the disciples with the words: 'It is I, have no fear,' and their mistrust of this strange phenomenon was dispelled" ("discipulis verus se manifestavit Meridies in eo quod audierunt: Ego sum, nolite timere, et falsi suspicio ab eis depulsa est") (33.13; I:243); if it is Jesus, it seems, he will tell us so. But how exactly is this kind of spell-

breaking utterance to be recognized? Bernard answers, again, only by way of a kind of prayer, which turns the figure of noontide once more on its head: "may the true Noontide, shining from the heavens, send forth his light and his truth even to us" ("Utinam et nobis . . . emittat lucem suam et veritatem suam . . . oriens ex alto verus Meridies") (33.13; I:243). It is perhaps not especially reassuring that Bernard does not say what the consequences of being taken in by the noonday demon would be, or give his listener any concrete examples of what that experience of being fatally deceived might look like; prayer, it seems, and the subsequent intervention of God's noontide grace, is our only hope.[23]

Bernard has only one abrupt twist left to give to his sermon, but it is a significant one. "If you are not worn out by the length of this sermon," he says, "I shall try to apply these four temptations in due order to the Church, and Body of Christ" ("nisi taedio fuerit longitudo sermonis, has quatuor tentationes tentabo suo ordine assignare ipsi corpori Christi, quod est Ecclesia") (33.14; I:243). Why? Perhaps to offer his listeners the reassurance of understanding at least where they are situated in the history of the church, since his discourse on the noontide devil has raised the specter of helplessness before demonic forces—or perhaps simply because this is what Augustine himself does. In broad outline, Bernard's fourfold schema of church history runs like this: the first age of the church is characterized in terms of the outright persecution and martyrdom of the saints, "the terror of the night" ("timore nocturno"). The second is distinguished by the influx of "vain and ambitious men" ("homines vani, cupidi gloriae") who "for long afflicted their mother [the church] with diverse and perverse doctrines"

[23] The effect is not dissimilar to that achieved by Adams's reading of Nede as the noonday demon with respect to the final passus of *Piers Plowman*. With Bernard's noonday devil, in this reading, one is set adrift in a world of hermeneutical deception, where the only way to be saved would be to have been already, by something like divine intervention, undeceived. But it is, in my view, the "interval" of humility and of humble prayer that, both in Bernard's thirty-third sermon on the Song of Songs and in Langland's *Piers Plowman*, unravels the Augustinian riddle: "But who calls on you when he does not know you? For an ignorant person might call upon someone else instead of the right one. But surely you may be called upon in prayer that you may be known" (*Confessions* I, 1.1).

("diu eamdem matrem suam afflixerunt in diversis et perversis dogmatibus")—the heretics, the "arrow that flies by day" ("sagittam volantem in die") (33.14; I:243). The third age, which Bernard believes himself to be living in, is described in terms of a "hypocrisy that is so prevalent that it cannot be hidden, and so impudent that it does not want to be. . . .Everyone is a friend, everyone an enemy . . . all are neighbors to each other, but all insist on their own way" ("hypocrisis . . . quae iam latere prae abundantia non valet, et prae impudentia non quaerit. . . .Omnes amici, et omnes inimici . . . omnes proximi, et omnes quae sua sunt quaerunt") (33.15; I:244). In much the same way that fastidiousness earned special attention in Bernard's application of this fourfold scheme to the temptations faced by the monk, here something like gluttony, the "bogus splendor" ("meretricius nitor") of the medieval church of his time, comes in for special censure (33, 15; I, 244). This period is particularly characterized by "a peace that is not peace" ("pax est, et non est pax") because the church "has peace from the pagans, peace from the heretics, but not peace from her own sons" ("Pax a paganis, pax ab haereticis, sed non profecto a filiis"); "most bitter of all is the corrupt morals of the members of the household" ("amarissima nunc in moribus domesticorum") (33.16; I:244). "Nothing remains," Bernard concludes, "but for the noontide devil to appear in our midst, to seduce those who still abide in Christ, who until now remain faithful to the truth" ("Superest ut iam de medio fiat daemonium et meridianum, ad seducendos, si qui in Christo sunt residui, adhuc permanentes in simplicitate sua") (33.16; I:245). The suspended longing for the noonday face of Christ is matched here by the indefinite fear of the noonday devil, whose seductive, deadening influence is worse even than the shameless hypocrisy of the Church.

As with his application of this fourfold schema to the temptations faced by his monastic audience, Bernard does not have very much to say about what this fourth and final phase might

look like. He is not one to indulge in Joachimite speculations as to the exact nature of Antichrist; as Bernard McGinn points out, this brief outline is as concrete as Bernard will ever get about the end times ("St. Bernard and Eschatology" 184).[24] We are instead simply and ominously warned that when the Antichrist does come, he will be as misleading as possible, and will claim to take the place of Christ himself:

> For he is Antichrist, who pretends that he is not only the day but the very noon, who 'exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship,' whom 'the Lord Jesus will slay with the breath of his mouth,' whom he will destroy with the light of his coming, because he is the true and eternal Noontide, the Bridegroom and defender of the Church; he is God, blessed for ever. Amen.
>
> ("Ipse enim est Antichristus, qui se non solum diem, sed et meridiem mentietur, et extolletur supra id quod dicitur aut quod colitur Deus: quem Dominus Iesus interficiet spiritu oris sui, et destruet illuminatione adventus sui, utpote verus et aeternus Meridies, sponsus et advocatus Ecclesiae, qui est Deus benedictus in saecula. Amen.") (33.16; I:245)

These final lines of Bernard's sermon reproduce in miniature the rhetorical figure that has distinguished the whole piece: the Saint seamlessly flips from a false noon back to a true one, all in the space of a subordinate clause. As was pointed out above, the whole sermon hinges on a

[24] He is, however—as McGinn also points out—just as urgent, if somewhat more vague, in the Preface to his *Vita sancti Malachiae*, where Bernard laments the spiritual "famine and sterility" ("fames et sterilitas") of his day, which must be "either the herald of one now present or the harbinger of one who shall come immediately" ("Sive igitur nuntia iam praesentis, sive iamiamque adfuturi praenuntia") (Praefatio; III:307)—Antichrist. "Whom, likewise, do you give me who is content with necessaries, who despises superfluities? Yet the law has been enjoined beforehand by the Apostles on the successors of the Apostles, *Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content*. Where is this rule? We see it in books, but not in men" ("Quem item das mihi contentum necessariis, contemptorem superfluorum? Lex est tamen praefixa ab Apostolis Apostolorum successoribus: Victum et vestitum habentes, inquiunt, his contenti simus. Ubi forma haec? In libris cernimus eam, sed non in viris") (Praefatio; III:308). This text, unlike the thirty-third sermon on the *Song*, was written after the failure of the Second Crusade (McGinn, "St. Bernard and Eschatology" 184).

transition from a kind of prayer to, and poignantly expressed longing for, the true noontide that is the face of Christ, to a set of warnings against the fourfold temptations that are faced by both the individual monk and, in an analogous way, by the whole church—temptations that, in both cases, culminate in the arrival of the mysterious noonday devil. But this latter half of the sermon, as in the last line of the above citation, is shot through with abrupt re-entries into the register of the sermon's first half, where Christ appears threaded throughout as the true noontide, himself the only place "where you pasture your flock, where you make it to lie down at noon"—in his own way just as unapproachable now as that eschatological paradise of presence and eternity and the image of God that Bernard laments, early on in the sermon, as essentially inaccessible to those of us still bound for now by memory, by time, and by what he calls simply the "slave's condition" ("forma servi"): "the husk of the sacrament is not received with the same pleasure as the fat of the wheat" ("non pari omnino iucunditate sumitur cortex sacramenti et adeps frumenti") (33.3; I:235). For Bernard, it is this experience of lack—"ritual failure," as M.B. Pranger describes it (26), or what Julia Kristeva calls "this passion of the body wrenching itself—which is called love" (166)—that is the foundational Christian experience. It is from these humble and almost pitiful beginnings that the journey that ends in glorification, and in the noonday vision of the face of Christ, necessarily begins.

Nede at noonday

In my view, Langland's Nede crystallizes a similar intuition in *Piers Plowman*. In order to see how it does so, and in order to disentangle the figure of Nede from the "inextricable difficulties" that Étienne Gilson says beset the question of "necessity" in St. Bernard's work as

well (42),[25] we will need to look closely at where and how this controversial figure appears in the poem, beginning with the poem's end where Nede makes its most significant appearance. The final passus of both B- and C-Texts of *Piers Plowman* begins with its protagonist Will's waking up. This is at least a little odd, because Will has just had a dream in which he saw the virtues of prudence, justice, and fortitude mocked and abused in turn; yet he wakes up before the fourth and final cardinal virtue, temperance, can come in for criticism. Only once awake does Will finally encounter not a critic or abuser of this last and traditionally least virtue,[26] but instead the newly, or at least much more thoroughly, personified allegorical figure of Nede. Nede claims the right to speak both for temperance and against all the other virtues—"*Spiritus fortitudinis* . . . / . . . shal do more than mesure mony tymes and often," and so on (C.XXII.20-34)—in his own allegorical person. The passus begins:

> And as Y wente by the way, when Y was thus awaked,
> Heuy-chered Y yede and elyng in herte,
> For Y ne wiste where to ete ne at what place.
> And hit neyhed neyh the noen and with Nede Y mette
> That afrounted me foule and faytour me calde:
> 'Couthest thow nat excuse the, as dede the kyng and othere,

[25] Gilson refers to the way Bernard describes the needs of the body as primary, but sometimes describes concupiscence itself as "necessary" in the sense that it will always be with us in our fallen condition. Carnal love is where we begin, but to prefer it to spiritual love is culpable (39-43). This involves Bernard in the kinds of paradoxes described by Pranger and Kristeva. For Gilson, it is important to distinguish between these two ideas of "necessity," but difficult to do so this side of heaven.

[26] David Aers asks us to "recall Aquinas explaining how without the presence of prudence (the cardinal virtue perfecting reason) we will simply lack temperance." After all, "temperance is below prudence and justice and fortitude. This is because prudence perfects reason, whereas the other cardinal virtues perfect the appetite powers" (*Beyond Reformation?* 89). In his *Summa Theologiae*, to which Aers refers, Aquinas states that "The proper end of each moral virtue consists precisely in conformity with right reason," and that "it belongs to the ruling of prudence to decide in what manner and by what means man shall obtain the mean of reason in his deeds" (IIa-IIae, q. 47, a. 7, resp.). I will have more to say about this, with specific reference to Bernard, later on.

That thow toke to lyue by, to clothes and to sustinaunce,

Was bi techyng and by tellyng of *Spiritus temperancie*

And that thow nome no more than nede the tauhte?

And nede ne hath no lawe ne neuere shal falle in dette . . . ' (C.XXII.1-10)

The self-proclaimed mouthpiece and master of temperance, Nede, begins this last rebuke of Will by immediately upbraiding him for perhaps the one thing he has not yet been accused of in the poem: being too hard on himself ("Couthest thow nat excuse the . . . ?"). In response to this perceived over-scrupulosity, Nede not only recommends something that has looked to Mary Carruthers and to some other critics like simple stealing;[27] he also boasts that "nede at greet nede may nyme as for his owne / Withouten consail of Consience or cardinale virtues / So that he sewe and saue *Spiritus temperancie*, / For is no vertu be ver to *Spiritus temperancie*" (C.XXII.20-3). This not only turns the most traditional ranking of the cardinal virtues on its head; it also appears to call into question the whole vision of the sowing of the cardinal virtues that was celebrated in the poem's penultimate passus, where "Grace gaf Peres graynes, cardinales vertues, / And sewe it in mannes soule" (C.XXI.274-5). It is not immediately clear how or whether this prior passage's orderly prioritization of the virtues can be reconciled with Nede's radical re-purposing of them, or whether the spirit of the Nede sequence can be reconciled with the rest of the poem at all.

[27] "Considering what the king and the rest have done with the virtues to which they appealed, this introduction should serve as a warning for what follows. Need's argument, baldly stated, is a justification for stealing" (Carruthers 160). Whereas Carruthers argues that "Temperance and *mesure*. . . .do not apply to the unusual situation of extreme need," referring to the latter as a "nonmoral condition," Richard Firth Green suggests that Nede must be understood in terms of the "notoriously subjective" difficulty ("Nede ne hath" 23) of determining whether the "necessity defense," a new legal reality from the late thirteenth century on, might apply in a given case of apparent theft (19). Nede's defiant declaration that "nede at greet nede may nyme as for his owne" (C.XXII.20) implies at least an awareness of the problem of determining what counts as "greet nede," and a broader determination to make judgments concerning this question the cornerstone of a whole need-based morality.

The circumstances immediately following Nede's appearance are no more propitious. Once Will swoons and falls asleep again at the end of Nede's speech, he dreams immediately that "Auntecrist cam thenne and al the crop of treuthe / Turned hit tyd vp-so-down and ouertulde the rote / And made fals sprynge and sprede and spede menne nedes" (C.XXII.53-5). This raises the difficult question of the specific, suspicious timing of the Nede episode: why does Nede appear just when the Antichrist is about to arrive, and the Unite of the Church is about to unravel? Ryan McDermott's recent book *Tropologies* has urged us not to neglect the tropological—that is, the moral, action-prescriptive—implications of *Piers Plowman* and other works of late medieval poetry; but McDermott also suggests that we would do well not to ignore the anagogical sense: as he puts it, *Piers*'s "final passus has plenty of ethical and institutional failure, to be sure, but the gap between tropological making and anagogical fulfillment retains an analogical interval that invites hope" (188). McDermott's focus on tropology means that he does not advance a systematic application of this insight into the place of "anagogical fulfillment" and hope in *Piers Plowman*, but his attention to the importance of chiasmus for understanding certain formal cruxes in the poem suggests an answer to the problem of Nede's appearing just as the Antichrist is about to arrive and the world is about to unravel: a reading of *Piers Plowman*, and of the figure of Nede in particular, in terms of a balanced anagogical movement at once "down" toward apocalypse and "up" toward humbled grace and redemption.[28]

In this respect the Nede sequence might be usefully compared not just with Bernardine anagogy as it is modeled in the *Sermons on the Song of Songs* but also with the more doggedly tropological structuring schema of Bernard's first treatise, *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae* ("On the Steps of Humility and Pride"). In the *De gradibus*, the steps of humility are said to be

[28] McDermott understands chiasmus as a favorite device of Langland's, because to employ chiasmus is to invoke the Cross (197-210).

exactly the same as the steps of pride, only in reverse: one must retrace one's steps down each individual step up to pride in order to climb back up toward humility again.[29] In an analogously chiastic understanding of the poem's final shame-inducing "lakkyng" of the Dreamer, the encounter with Nede in Passus XXII of the C-Text would represent—even as Nede is indeed in a sense a harbinger of the approaching Antichrist—a final necessary "bottoming out" that is also the beginning of a new search, in a new and a more humbled spirit. "Y gan awake" (C.XXII.386), after all, are the very last words of the poem; if Will is to be understood as waking back up in the same place where he was when he fell into his dream, then he must also be understood as waking up, at the end of the poem, once again in the presence of Nede.[30] The end of *Piers Plowman*, then, implies not only the ongoing, newly pilgrimage-inflected search of Conscience, who "wol bicome a pilgrime / . . . / To seke Peres the plouhman, that Pruyde myhte destruye" (C.XXII.380-2)—and who spares two of the poem's final lines on the "freres" who "for nede flateren," and who therefore need a "fyndynge" (C.XXII.383)—but also the beginning of a new journey for Will, accompanied now by the unpredictable but not necessarily unorthodox mouthpiece of temperance—and so by a new awareness of his own fundamental neediness, which his encounter with Nede has urged him to embrace.

A look at Nede's other appearances in the poem will help to make this humbling itinerary more clear. When critics reach beyond Nede's appearance at the beginning of the final passus of the poem, they tend to look ahead to Nede's intervention—confoundingly reasonable-seeming,

[29] Bernard's reproof of curiosity, the first of the steps of pride and the one he spends the most time on by far, is particularly resonant with *Piers Plowman*: "Look to the earth, that you may know yourself. It will represent yourself to you, because you are earth, and into the earth you will go" ("Terram intuere, ut cognoscas teipsum. Ipsa te tibi repraesentabit, quia terra es et in terram ibis") (X.28; III:38).

[30] Nicolette Zeeman pointed this out to me in response to a truncated version of this chapter, which was given as a paper at the International Piers Plowman Society Conference at the University of Miami in May 2019.

for those in the anti-Nede camp[31]—almost two hundred lines on, after Will has fallen asleep again and retreated into the besieged barn of Unite. Barricaded inside the barn against the ascendant forces of Antichrist, Conscience calls for help from Clergie; in response he receives a group of friars who, offering their assistance in Conscience's time of crisis, ask to be let into the barn. Nede, who seems correctly to anticipate that the friars' famously easygoing confession will eventually threaten the Unity of the Church, advises Conscience not to let them in, for, "senne freres forsoke the felicite of erthe / Lat hem be as beggares or lyue by angeles fode!" (C.XXII.240-1).[32] Nede's advice is not heeded, and before long the barn is in ruins. Conscience protests the introduction of one "frere Flatrere" on the grounds that "We haen no nede" (C.XXII.315-8), but by then the fatal step has already been taken, and the "frere with his fisyk . . . doth men drynke dwale [opiate], that they drat no synne" (C.XXII.378-9). In one of the poem's most strikingly counter-intuitive inversions of its allegorical figures, we are told that "Contricioun hadde clene foryete to crye and to wepe" (C.XXII.369). The barn of Unite has been corrupted from the inside.

The most cursory reading of this passage would suggest that, whatever its motivations, Nede is right to be suspicious of the friars. However, because it is at least possible to argue that the Nede who appears on this level of the dream is significantly different from the Nede who appears in the passus's previous passage, and because Nede's being right here does not

[31] Mary Carruthers's *Search for St. Truth* is admirably consistent in its application of anti-Nede mistrust to this passage as well: "This is an analysis that shows no understanding at all of patient poverty," she writes of Nede's advice to Conscience on the friars. Her suggestion that Nede seriously implies "that the friars should be rich so that they would not have to beg food from hard-working men," however, strains credulity (166).

[32] More typical than Carruthers's consistent critique is Robert Adams's invocation of a "neutral" Nede at work in this passage ("The Nature of Need" 279)—a Nede who understands the friars' motivations, more or less, because it takes a thief to know one. Until they have a "patrimonie" of their own, Nede knows, they will remain in need of financial support—and so will be forced to continue offering up easy confession in exchange for alms: "And for thei aren pore . . . / Thei wol flatere, to fare wel, folk that ben riche" (C.XXII.234-5). Nicolette Zeeman writes of this passage, "Bizarrely, Nede then includes some unexceptionable remarks . . . " (*Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire* 280).

necessarily mean it is right always, a thorough reading of the figure's place in the poem should begin instead with a passage less frequently cited in the criticism: Passus XIII of the C-Text, where Imaginatif appears and encourages the Dreamer to re-commence his search for Dowel, and where Nede appears as a possibly personified allegorical figure for the first time in the poem. The Dreamer's previous search for Dowel was broken off by Will's long, introspective excursion into the "lond of longyng."[33] In Passus XIII, Imaginatif suggests that Will would have learned significantly more on this earlier quest, had he been patient and suffered Clergie and Resoun to speak for longer, remaining silent himself. Instead, the Dreamer acted like Adam, who "mamelede aboute mete and musede for to knowe" (C.XIII.226). Imaginatif goes on to explain that it was "For pruyde or presompcioun of thy parfit lyvynge" that "Resoun refusede the," as did Clergie, for both knew that a proud person can't learn anything of substance anyway:

> For shal neuere, ar shame come, a shrewe wel be chasted.
> For lat a dronkene daffe in a dykke falle,
> Lat hym lygge, lok nat on hym til hym luste to ryse;
> For thogh Resoun rebuke hym thenne, recheth he neuere,
> Ne of Clergie ne of Kynde Wyt counteth he nat a rusche;
> To blame hym or to bete hym thenne Y halde hit but synne.
> Ac when Nede nymeth hym vp, anoen he is aschamed

[33] The potential for comparison here between Langland's "lond of longyng" and Bernard's "regio dissimilitudinis" ("realm of unlikeness"), a phrase borrowed originally from Augustine's *Confessions* and brought to scholarly attention by Étienne Gilson in particular, is evident; but I do not treat it in detail in this chapter. This decision was motivated by a desire to focus on the anagogical dimension in Langland's thinking, and by the fact that the theme has already been thoroughly explored, both by Margaret E. Goldsmith in her article "Piers' Apples: Some Bernardine echoes in *Piers Plowman*," and at the length of an unpublished dissertation, *Out of the Land of Unlikeness: Bernardine Mystical Theology and Piers Plowman, B and C*, by Lisa Haines Wright. The specifically Bernardine sense of the phrase, especially as it is employed in his *Sermones super cantica canticorum*, will be described later on in this study in a more speculative application of the *regio* to the work of Thomas Malory in Chapter Four. It is nonetheless of course suggestive, as I have noted above, that this "longyng" episode begins with the citation of a Pseudo-Bernardine treatise.

And thenne woet he wherfore and why he is to blame. (C.XIII.233-40)

This early appearance of Nede as a redemptive principle linked with shame is less commonly noticed than the later episodes—in part, surely, because it is not even clear that Nede is personified yet—but there is no obvious reason to call Imaginatif's assessment of Nede's value as a necessary humbling agent into question.[34] Langland's allegorical figures are famously unstable,[35] but the passage can be shown to directly prefigure Nede's later, longer appearance, where Nede certainly humbles Will, and where, in language directly recalling the earlier scene, Nede once again specifically "nymeth" (C.XXII.17) and is said to "nyme" (C.XXII.20).

The passage in Passus XIII also hearkens back to the first use of the word "nede" in the poem, where Holy Church advises Will that "resoun sholde reule yow alle / And Kynde Witte be wardeyn youre welthe to kepe / And tutor of youre tresor and take it yow at nede / For hosbondrye and he holdeth togederes" (C.I.50-3). With remarkable consistency, Langland suggests an interdependence between a necessary "nyme"-ing at the hands of Nede, and the capacity to be ruled by the reasonable advice of "Kynde Witte"—thereby firmly, if furtively,

[34] In his treatise *De diligendo deo* ("On Loving God") Bernard recommends that one must always keep in mind "both what you are, and that you are not so by your own power, so that you do not either not glory at all, or vainly glory" ("et quid sis, et quod a teipso non sis, ne aut omnino videlicet non glorieris, aut inaniter glorieris") (II.4; III:122)—the one in order to guard against despair, and the other in order to guard against the kind of "presumpcioun" Imaginatif warns the Dreamer against. As a sort of Bernardine homiletic tool, Imaginatif's invocation of shame is evidently not intended to provoke despair at the Dreamer's most essential identity—which, as God-given, can only be taken as a cause for shame in a really presumptuous spirit. Bernard's *Sermon on the Nativity of the Virgin Mary* makes a very Langlandian point about the generative role of imagination in the Christian life: "The Word has become flesh and lives in us. For it clearly lives by faith in our hearts, it lives in our memory, it lives in our thought and it descends to the seat of imagination itself. How else would a man be able to think about God, unless it were by fashioning idols in his heart?" ("Verbum caro factum est, et habitat iam in nobis. Habitat plane per fidem in cordibus nostris, habitat in memoria nostra, habitat in cogitatione, et usque ad ipsam descendit imaginationem. Quid enim prius cogitaret homo de Deo, nisi forsitan idolum corde fabricaretur?") (10; V:282). As Nede's first appearance also suggests, the crucial question is how such idols may be appropriately "chasted."

[35] Nicolette Zeeman observes that, "at crucial moments" in the poem, "terms, personifications and even narratives turn out to be less than they seem." She describes how "Langland integrates multiple interpretive discourses into his allegorical narrative in a highly unsettling fashion. His disintegrative narratives purposely subvert expectation, illustrating the extremes to which he is prepared to go in order to probe understanding and interrogate desire" ("Medieval religious allegory" 161). My argument implies that "Nede" is one of those few figures who resist this disintegration—or, perhaps better, that Nede is the dissolving agent in which the other figures are reduced.

linking the figure of Nede with the Dreamer's central quest for a "kynde knowyng" of the truth and true love (C.I.136-7). The C-Text's Passus XIII therefore seems to me to offer the most obvious reading of Nede's role in the poem, as it is the reading of the figure that the poem itself explicitly and consistently offers: the experience of need, and a consequent attunement to the problem of taking for oneself only "at nede," alone makes it possible for the prideful, presumptuous person to "reche" the rebukes of Reason and the teachings of Clergy and Kind Wit. Without an experience of Nede, it seems, it is not only impossible for the proud sinner to be reformed; it is in fact even sinful to "blame hym," so far is he from being able to receive that blame in the right spirit. As in the early Christian catechetical document called the *Didache*, in *Piers Plowman* "need" becomes one of the constitutive categories of Christian ethics.[36]

Providing an overview of Bernardine theology in his Introduction to the "Classics of Western Spirituality" series' *Selected Works*, the celebrated Bernard scholar Jean Leclercq sets out the importance of humility and need for Bernard's thought in very similar terms to the ones I have been inferring from *Piers Plowman*:

> Man's end is to recognize truth, which is God. To do this he must be aware that his relationship with God is based on need. The obstacle to the relationship is pride; the

[36] Although there is surely no direct connection, the *Didache*—in fact the earliest extant Christian catechetical document—dedicates much of its first chapter to the question of need: "Give to everyone who asks you, and do not demand it back. . . .Woe to the one who receives. If anyone receives because one is in need, this one is innocent. But the one who receives without a need will have to explain why and for what purpose he received, and he will be thrown into prison and will be interrogated about what he did, and he will not be released from there until he pays back every last cent. For it has also been said concerning this: 'Let your gift sweat in your hands until you know to whom to give it'" (Kalantzis 76-7). Gilson describes the way Bernardine spirituality centers itself on the "needs of the body," the "primary necessity" of which "throws ramifications over the whole field of human life, giving rise to the arts—of clothing for instance, of building, of curing bodily ills" (39). Gilson sounds very much like Langland's Imaginatif when he observes that, for Bernard, "That the will has overstepped the limits of natural necessity may be recognized by this sign: that it no longer sees any reason to keep its desires within bounds" (41). The passage in Bernard's writing that resonates maybe the most with Nede's discourse comes at the beginning of his first sermon on the Ascension: "[Christ] has no scorn but rather compassion for our needs, if we make provision for the flesh not out of desire but out of need" ("nec dedignatur necessitates nostras, sed miseratur, si tamen curam carnis non in desiderio facimus, sed in necessitate") (1; V:123).

> remedy is humility. Grace is the condition for meeting God in Christ. The result is the esteem man places on his dignity, rediscovered in God's image. While self-ignorance and pride lessen man's worth, humility, which recognizes man's need as well as his capacity for God, reveals man to himself. (38)

According to Leclercq's Bernard, then—as according to Langland's Imaginatif—there is no other way, at least for a "shrewe," to come to his senses, than to be humbled by the realization "that his relationship with God is based on need." From the evidence of the C-Text's Passus XIII, it would seem that a weighty reason to read the final passus of *Piers Plowman* against the text would be necessary, in order to compel one to see the Dreamer's final confrontation with Nede as anything other than his being humbled by a confrontation with his own fundamental neediness as a final remedy for pride. Although its results are not depicted in the poem, Will therefore at least potentially arrives, in *Piers*'s last passus, at that redemptive principle of shame-inducing humility that is recommended, by both Imaginatif and by St. Bernard, as a kind of beginning of wisdom.[37] He is finally prepared now, having reached the bottom of the ladder of pride, to ascend.

Nede and the critics

[37] In his second sermon for the Ascension, Bernard admonishes: "It is impossible for you to ascend unless you begin by descending. That is an eternal law: 'He who exalts himself will be humbled; he who humbles himself will be exalted'" ("Neque enim ascendere potes, nisi descenderis, quia, ut aeterna lege fixum est, Omnis qui se exaltat humiliabitur, et qui se humiliat exaltabitur") (6;V:130). Commenting on the *De gradibus* treatise, M.B. Pranger notes that, "By focusing on descent rather than ascent, Bernard introduces the category of failure as a constitutive factor in the monastic life" (*Bernard of Clairvaux* 50). Following Pranger, G.R. Evans describes this idea of constitutive failure as "deeply attractive to [Bernard] because it went with the sacrifice and struggle to which he believed Christ had called his people" (*Bernard of Clairvaux* 4). Although it eventually comes down on the side of the anti-Nede camp, Zeeman's *Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire*, sensitive as it is to the constitutive role of failure and lack in the poem, is in my view broadly resonant with my own Bernardine reading.

It is the tendency of the anti-Nede critics to want to see the action of the final passus of *Piers Plowman* as more or less straightforwardly bad,[38] rather than to look for the logic of a finally necessary humbling—which is also, necessarily, a kind of unravelling—that has led them to miss the "analogical interval that invites hope" McDermott identifies. A somewhat closer look at the substance of those anti-Nede critics' arguments, and at the way the negativity they identify in the final passus of the poem itself serves to open up that "interval" of humbled prayer with which *Piers Plowman* concludes, will help to describe the "downward" side of the poem's chiastic trajectory, and to see how a Bernardine anagogical lens casts new light on this double movement. Although it has already emerged that my own reading skews "pro-Nede" in its tendency to see Nede as a kind of master trope for *Piers Plowman*, conditioning Langland's implicit assessment of everything—"is this really necessary?", or, again, will it help me to "saue my soul"? [39]—this is in part because I believe the pro-Nede argument can be effectively reconciled with the essence of the anti-Nede position, drawing the crucial insights of this latter camp up into its own orbit without simply negating them. I do not believe the same can be said of the opposite position. It is this reconciliation between something like, on the level of Christian practice, the "perfectionist" mentality of the anti-Nede critics, and the more "mediocrist" pro-

[38] Zeeman describes Conscience's cry in terms of the "narratives of denial and loss" that "have shaped the poem since its inception." Her suggestion that "one more such narrative brings the poem to its famously gaping close" is representative of anti-Nede readings of *Piers*'s conclusion (*Piers Plowman* 283), and depends partly on her seeing Nede as "problematic precisely because he is the corruption of something Langland values" (279). Rebecca Davis's recent *Piers Plowman and the Books of Nature*, despite its description of what Davis calls Langland's "optimistic theology" (243), follows Zeeman in not seeing anything particularly optimistic about Nede: "Need should not be understood as demonic or inherently immoral," Davis says, but "this passage is designed to unsettle readers. . . .The world Need describes in order to justify theft is already a world in which Antichrist reigns because it is a world devoid of charity" (192). My argument implies that the Nede episode is hopeful, without being at all optimistic.

[39] Holy Church begins her instruction of Will with the advice that, in order to be faithful to God and to do as truth teaches, Will must take the necessities of life ("bilyue") "in mesure" (C.I.18-9), for "Mesure is medecyne" (C.I.33). As I pointed out above, she goes on to specify that "resoun sholde reule yow alle / And Kynde Witte be wardeyn youre welthe to kepe / And tutor of youre tresor and take it yow at nede" (C.I.50-2). Will's later complaint that he has "no kynde knowyng" of truth and true love (C.I.136-7) is therefore introduced in the context of a conversation about moderation and needfulness; "Kynde Witte" knows what is "at nede."

Nede approach, that I see the poem as working toward,[40] and that I understand as characteristic of the anagogical Bernardine theology implicit in his *Sermones super cantica canticorum*, but not fully developed, and often frustrated, in the history of his influence.

Jill Mann's 2004 article "The Nature of Need Revisited" responds directly and at length to Robert Adams's influential study from 1978, "The Nature of Need in 'Piers Plowman' XX." There are many battle-lines between them, but Mann identifies and responds to four specific objections that Adams makes to the character of Nede: his close textual proximity to the appearance of Antichrist, which Adams relates specifically and originally to the apocalyptic figure of the "noonday demon" of Psalm 91.6; his un-traditional prioritization of temperance as the highest of the four cardinal virtues, inverting the order established by Aristotle and followed by Aquinas; his following on the heels of a series of parodically inverted virtues that begins with the lewed vicory's lamenting the way "*Spiritus prudencie* among the peple is gyle" (C.XXI.455); and his sounding to some critics like one of the friars, who have sometimes been identified as Langland's most inveterate ideological enemies (Mann 5-10). Mann's answers to these objections are generally convincing. She finds a relevant, orthodox analogue for Nede's

[40] I use these terms with specific reference to Nicholas Watson's article "Chaucer's Public Christianity," which distinguishes between Chaucer's "mediocrist world, in which practical human arrangements and actual human desires hold temporary sway, urged as they are by the would-be moral imperatives of religion" (112) and "alternative perfectionist models" that, by the late fourteenth century, "gave almost the same opportunities—and made almost the same demands on—the devout laity as they did professional religious and the clerisy" (101-2). Watson aligns the latter with Langland, "for whom the search for salvation and the search for perfection intertwine to the point that seeking God comes to constitute the only valid form of living, and who parodies the weaker, mediocrist position in the figure of Haukyn, or *Activa Vita*" (104). Eleanor Johnson's emphasis on the importance for *Piers* of the "mixed life"—which Watson tends to see in terms of emerging perfectionist models (102)—suggests a sense in which Langland might be seen as both caught between and attempting to reconcile the two opposing drifts. Johnson suggests that the transformation of the B-Text's Haukyn into the C-Text's more generously portrayed *Activa Vita* implies that, "In the moral universe of the C-Text . . . labor is the *only* path to salvation" (*Staging Contemplation* 102). In my view, one function of the figure of Nede is to suggest that the perfectionist and mediocrist models need to be reconciled, in a vision of life that is truly "mixed" in its attention to real needs of every kind. Part of Will's (and Conscience's) being humbled, it seems to me, is his giving up a certain degree of "perfectionism." It seems to me not coincidental that the dichotomy between mediocrist and perfectionist positions is roughly reproduced in the modern-day critical camps.

inversion of the virtues,[41] suggests that the passus break between the lewed vicory and Nede firmly separates the latter from the parodies of the virtues that precede him, and draws on the work of Kathryn Kerby-Fulton in particular to argue that views of Langland as simply and one-sidedly anti-Franciscan are plainly myopic. Moreover, and more positively, she convincingly argues for a Langlandian "need ethos," defined by the "ius necessitatis" that she sees Langland as yoking together, in a "brilliant stroke," with the justification for the redemption of man by Christ (27). To dismiss Nede, in Mann's reading, is to discard the very cornerstone of the poem, and one of Langland's most distinctive poetical-intellectual flourishes: he identifies simple human vulnerability as the precise point of contact between a needy mankind and a God who is said to act always out of necessity.[42]

Mann's answer to Adams's strong association of Nede with the "noonday demon" of Psalm 91, and so with Antichrist and apocalypse, is, however, less carefully realized than her other counter-arguments. The disagreement between the two critics on this point, elaborated at somewhat comical cross-purposes, centers around the question of whether it means anything significant that Nede appears to the Dreamer specifically as it "neyhed neyh the noen" (C.XXII.4). In his thoroughgoingly exegetical mode, Adams construes this line as evidence that

[41] Mann traces the influence of the twelfth-century *Moralium dogma philosophorum*, which similarly inverts the hierarchy of the virtues, through Brunetto Latini to John Gower (4-5). As I will make clear below, this seems to me among the least convincing—and least necessary—of her counter-arguments. Langland may have had specific analogues for Nede's speech, but what he does with need and the virtue of temperance is, as Mann suggests elsewhere, startlingly original—and yet also broadly resonant with entirely orthodox sources, such as St. Bernard. As Caroline Walker Bynum puts it, Bernard shows "a deep commitment to reversal as lying at the heart of the Christian vocation" (*Metamorphosis* 126). See Footnote 16 above for more on Bernard's inversion, or perhaps even collapse, of the hierarchy of the virtues.

[42] Following Gilson, Julia Kristeva notes that "Bernard defined *carnal love* as primary, *de facto* if not *de jure*" (162). As I suggest above, this "primary necessity" is for Bernard where the journey to God necessarily begins (Gilson 39). For a more recent, more Thomist attempt to ground human identity in necessity and dependence, see Alasdair MacIntyre's *Dependent Rational Animals*, which argues that resisting the commonplace temptation to "imagine ourselves as other than animal, as exempt from the hazardous condition of 'mere' animality," helps us to not lose sight of another defining quality of human experience: our essential vulnerability, and our consequently definitive state of dependence (4). This is something like the lesson Will learns (at last) in the final passus of *Piers Plowman*.

Nede must be understood as representing the final apocalyptic figure in a fourfold paradigm of church history developed originally by St. Augustine in his *Enarrationes in psalmos* and later elaborated, as we have seen, by Bernard in his *Sermones super cantica canticorum*. Mann, on the other hand, dismisses the timing of the encounter as a "simple joke," indicating no more than that the dreamer is "seriously hungry" because it is almost dinnertime (6). As I have pointed out above, Adams was the first to identify Langland's figure of Nede with the "egestas" ("need") that is said, in Job Chapter 41 in the Vulgate, to precede Leviathan—and that was generally understood, by the time of St. Bernard at least, as a kind of allegory for Antichrist: "it was commonly believed that the period immediately prior to the Antichrist tribulation would be marked by widespread famine and indigence as well as spiritual impoverishment" ("The Nature of Need" 282).[43] This theory was influentially elaborated in St. Gregory the Great's "Moralia in Iob," which Adams believes to have been almost certainly a significant and direct source for Langland's Nede episode; in that text, Gregory distinguishes between the "need of the elect" ("egestas electorum") that occurs "when the true riches of the heavenly homeland return to their souls, and, placed as they are in this execrable exile of the present life, they remember themselves to be poor" ("cum verae divitiae coelestis patriae ad eorum animum redeunt, et in hoc aerumnoso praesentis vitae exsilio positi, pauperes se esse meminerunt"), and the "need of the reprobate" ("egestas reproborum"), whereby the wicked "are refilled with vices, and evacuated of the riches of the virtues" ("replentur vitiis, virtutum divitiis vacuantur") (*PL* Vol. 76, cols. 719c-720b). The latter "need," Gregory suggests, tends to privilege the visible necessities of life

[43] It is usefully corrective to Adams's view to observe that, in his first sermon for the Circumcision, Bernard also follows Jerome and Isidore in identifying Leviathan with "excess—that Leviathan, the poison of sinful desire and of unrestrained and disordered enticements to pleasure" ("additamentum illud Leviathan . . . , venenum scilicet concupiscentiae et immoderatae atquae inordinatae illecebra voluptatis") (1; IV:274). Whatever else Nede may be, it is hard to imagine him as a figure for "excess."

to such an extent that the soul becomes unable to even imagine the existence of more spiritual, invisible needs. This "need of the reprobate" is, of course, the need that Adams identifies with the Nede of Langland's poem—who is, after all, suspiciously attentive "to clothes and to sustinaunce," and with whom Adams is determined to connect that ultimate reprobate, Antichrist.[44]

As Adams points out, when the Dreamer falls asleep and the apocalypse commences at the end of Nede's speech, the Antichrist doesn't just arrive; he is also spoken of specifically in terms of manipulating mankind's "nedes": "in mannes fourme / Auntecrist cam thenne and al the crop of treuthe / Turned it tyd vp-so-down and ouertulde the rote / And made fals sprynge and sprede and spede menne nedes" (C.XXII.52-5). David Aers's gloss of this passage in his recent study *Beyond Reformation?* is representative of the way anti-Nede critics tend to see Nede as, at the very least, guilty by association: "in multiplying our so-called *nedes* . . . , Antichrist teaches us to forget the word *enough*" (90). Mann's response to this particular observation displays a characteristic blend of etymological precision and simple common sense: she points out first that Adams's demonization of Nede depends in part upon a simple mistranslation of the Middle English phrase "spede menne nedes" (C.XXII.55), which Adams takes to mean that mankind will become more needy at the time of Antichrist's coming.[45] Mann cites the *Middle English Dictionary* and Chaucer's *Reeve's Tale* to show that this set phrase instead means something

[44] Adams rounds out his Gregorian critique of Nede with a passage from Gregory's commentary on the first chapter of Job, where the saint stresses that no virtue may really exist in isolation from the others—"Disjoined, [the virtues] may by no means be perfected" ("Disjunctae autem perfectae esse nequaquam possunt") (*PL* Vol. 76, col. 212c)—thereby undercutting Nede's suggestion that a truly temperate soul would possess all the other virtues by default. Bernard, however, takes a similar line to argue, much like Nede, that since all the virtues are interrelated and moderate one another, they can all almost by summarized by a principle of prudential moderation. See Footnote 16 above.

[45] More specifically, Adams views "mennes nedes" here as endlessly multiplying, like "a kind of uncontrollable weed in the blighted garden of truth" ("The Nature of Need" 279). I would retain the metaphor, but suggest that the weeds ought to represent, following the Bernardine schema as Julia Kristeva describes it, the "negatively connoted *cupidity* that carries away (*trahit*)," stifling the "*amor* that acts (*urget*) out of *necessity*" (164).

more like "to satisfy one's desires" or "to get what one wanted" (6), turning Adams's point on its head. On this reading, it is precisely the refusal, or conditioned inability, of men and women to "byde and to be nedy" (C.XXII.48)—as Nede recommends just a few lines before the "spede menne nedes" phrase is used—that renders them vulnerable to the wiles of Antichrist. The apocalypse of *Piers Plowman*'s last passus, then, is not so much a matter of Adams's "widespread famine and indigence" as it is of a "spiritual impoverishment" brought on by a lack of true neediness. Derek Pearsall's gloss of the phrase in his edition of the C-Text—"prosper men's (worldly) desires" (366)—aligns nicely with this reading, and therefore suggests again that there may be a sharp break, rather than a linear progression, between the appearance of Nede in the first fifty lines of the poem's final passus and the assault of Antichrist that begins just afterward, when Will has fallen back asleep.

Mann's intervention here overlaps with my proposed chiastic reading of the poem, where the final passus of the B- and C-Texts must be understood in terms of a conjunction of humbled grace and dramatic unraveling. In this reading, Nede's appearance would represent a kind of final desperate altar call, where the homilist strains the bounds of language and of doctrine in a last desperate effort to inoculate Will against the coming dissolution. But this still leaves open the question of why Nede must appear just before the hour of noon, and the whole problem of intersecting allegorical planes at the poem's end. If, following Mann and Green, I am right, and Nede is best understood as both "apocalyptic sign" and "redemptive principle" at once, then we would expect to find a dramatic switching of allegorical gears when Will falls asleep and the Antichrist appears; we have seen Nede as a redemptive principle, and now we will see the apocalypse he wanted to save us from. Firmly situated "before the face" of Leviathan—only with a greater stress on the separation implicit in this critical "before" than Adams's reading allows—

the Nede who confronts the Dreamer at the beginning of the C-Text's Passus XXII could even be imagined, in this reading, as himself giving Will a vision of the universal humbling to come, something like Dickens's ghost of Christmas Future: this is what comes, the vision suggests, of those who do not understand themselves to be needy.

As I have already pointed out, Mann's interpretation of the nearness of noon in Passus XXII tends to minimize these apocalyptic implications, referring the passage's singularly precise timing to the most banal of cultural contexts: "If Langland meets Need at noon, it is because, in fourteenth-century England, noon is dinner-time, as is made quite clear elsewhere in *Piers Plowman* (B.5.492-93; C.9.247), and that is when one would start to get seriously hungry. Need first emerges in this passus as the voice of Langland's rumbling tummy; to ignore this is to overlook the wit and precision of the allegory" ("The Nature of Need" 6). Against Mann, and in line with Adams's identification of Nede both with Gregory's "egestas" and with the "noonday demon" of the Augustinian-Bernardine scheme, which Adams defines as "the period of universal deception initiated by the advent of the final Antichrist" ("The Nature of Need" 299), I would suggest instead that Langland should be understood as re-interpreting and re-purposing the figure of the noonday devil to his own ends, much as he re-interprets the "egestas reproborum" of Gregory's apocalypse more in terms of a multiplication of soul-deadening acquisition than of a period of widespread, literal famine and indigence. The Dreamer's encounter with Nede is indeed, as Mann describes it, a kind of material experience-based allegory of a literally and spiritually hungry Dreamer who, in his deeply felt neediness, comes at least potentially to know Christ more "kindly," as he has hoped to all along;[46] but it is also an apocalyptic encounter in

[46] In her lecture "Langland and Allegory" and her article "Eating and Drinking in *Piers Plowman*," Mann beautifully captures the way "Langland makes us constantly aware of the way in which life is lived at the intersection of the material and the non-material, the concrete and the abstract" ("Langland and Allegory" 30), suggesting "an extra dimension of meaning" beyond either the concrete or the abstract in isolation (39). In the Tree of Charity scene,

which Will comes face to face with the temptation of the noonday devil, as Langland dramatically re-imagines it. The ambiguous promise and menace of noontide as it is portrayed in Bernard's thirty-third sermon on the Song of Songs, which Adams himself cites only at secondhand,[47] suggests that Langland's noon may be a significantly more ambivalent time than has yet been recognized, with serious consequences for how we should read the allegorical figure who appears, berating the Dreamer for not taking what he needs and singing the praises of his own virtue, as that fateful hour approaches.

"Y moet nede abyde": Needing anagogy in *Piers Plowman*

Vincent Gillespie and Maggie Ross describe the traditional distinction between negative and positive theologies in terms of a "play of absence and presence" that "characterizes the human experience of engagement with the ineffable" (53). The same phrase might be used to characterize St. Bernard's thirty-third sermon on the Song of Songs, and William Langland's *Piers Plowman*. One recent high-water mark in *Piers* criticism, Nicolette Zeeman's *Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire*, stressed the place of absence and frustrated desire in the poem to tremendous effect. The above readings of *Piers* and of Bernard's thirty-third sermon on the Song of Songs, however, should suggest that desire for Bernard and for

"Charity and the growth of an everyday tree become parallel mysteries, neither of which takes precedence over the other" (30): "The only way you can know apples, for Langland, is to eat them" ("Eating and Drinking" 41).

[47] In his "Nature of Need" article, Adams makes regular reference to Bernard McGinn's study "St Bernard and Eschatology." McGinn sees Bernard as poised between a "spiritualizing eschatology and purely vertical anagogy" more typical of monastic spirituality in general, and a "major resurgence of historicizing anagogy"—as exemplified, albeit in a relatively moderate form, by the Augustinian fourfold scheme—which McGinn understands as characteristic of certain shifts in twelfth century Christian thinking on the apocalypse (163). In his later, related article "Some Versions of Apocalypse: Learned and Popular Eschatology in *Piers Plowman*," Adams depicts Langland as a champion of an "otherworldly and moralistic vision of human destiny endorsed by many generations of learned exegetes," as opposed to a "volatile melange of popular vaticinations that threatened to poison spirituality at its roots by redirecting mankind's energies from the task of personal *ascesis* to a sterile curiosity about current events" (195). Adams's own reading is certainly "moralistic," but I think this predisposes it to miss the flexibility of an exegete like Bernard, and of a poet like Langland—and so of "popular" eschatology more broadly. It is possible, as I think *Piers Plowman* proves, to vaticinate in an otherworldly vein.

Langland can, in its own way, have as much to do with presence as with absence. This seems to me near the heart of the anti- and pro-Nede debate: Jill Mann et al. constitute a kind of party of presence, advocating for the poem's vision of a needy Christ who identifies with his creation to such an extent that he would of course identify with, and even make himself present himself to, the inglorious vicissitudes of real physical hunger. Nede's Christ himself stresses this theme:

> "Bothe fox and foule may fle to hole and crepe
> And the fisch hath fyn to flete with to reste,
> Ther nede hath ynome me that Y moet nede abyde
> And soffre sorwes ful soure that shal to ioye torne." (C.XXII.44-7)[48]

The promised turn from sorrow to joy here, like Bernard's sudden fits and starts from abjection to intimations of a noontide at once already prefigured in the sunrise of Christ's resurrection and still to be accomplished at an indefinite point in the future, is both something that has already happened and something that is still happening, at least potentially, to the Dreamer now; it is also still, and always, to be desired: "Y moet nede abyde." Thus the needy "abiding" of the suffering Christ engenders a hope that holds past and present and future together in an "eschatological tension" something like what Augustine describes, in his Narration on the thirty-seventh Psalm, as the "way of desire": "There is another way of praying, interior and unbroken, and that is the way of desire. Whatever else you are doing, if you long for the sabbath, you are not ceasing to pray" (37.14). "abyde," after all—a word that, as we will see, Nede consistently associates with

[48] It is sometimes pointed out, as a knock against Nede's character, that he claims Christ said this "in his sorwe on the sulue rode," when the relevant passages really occur much earlier in Christ's career (Matt. 8.20, Luke 9.58). But it seems to me typical of *Piers*'s compressed temporal landscape as it approaches its end—and resonant with Nede's exhortation to Will to identify with the suffering God who "cam and toek mankynde and bicam nedy" (C.XXII.41)—that the life and death of Christ should be collapsed here into the moment of crucifixion. Paul writes, "Non enim judicavi me scire aliqiud inter vos, nisi Jesum Christum, et hunc crucifixum" ("I judged myself to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified") (1 Cor. 2.2).

the neediness he recommends as a kind of beginning of wisdom—is very near, in Middle English, to the words for bending or bowing, for humbling oneself, and for prayer.[49]

A positive and even hopeful emphasis on the place of a kind of Bernardine anagogical longing for the eternal in time in *Piers*, or even for something like Augustine's "way of desire" as also a "way of Nede" could, I think, usefully nudge our reading of a poem, sometimes depicted as almost hopelessly gloomy, into a more appropriately hopeful key.[50] Adams himself contrasts hope in *Piers Plowman* with "the hope of the Joachites, which is in the future"; *Piers*'s hope, ultimately, is "in something that has already happened, something that can begin to redeem Will at any moment he chooses to allow it" ("Some Versions of Apocalypse" 200). Even Adams's strong emphasis on the "basically pessimistic, penitential function of present time in Augustinian eschatology" (196) is not necessarily at odds with this more positive, chiastic reading.[51] The anti-Nede party of absence, which sometimes risks becoming the party of pessimism, tends rightly to emphasize this "penitential" quality in the poem, and the way it doggedly insists on inhabiting the vicissitudes of time, rather than straining upward toward some perhaps inevitably overreaching vision of the eternal. In her study *The Place of God in Piers Plowman and Medieval Art*, Sister Mary Clemente Davlin contrasts the emphatic earthliness of *Piers Plowman*'s close with the "Mens imago Dei est"-type epiphany at the end of Dante's

[49] According to the *Middle English Dictionary*, the verb "beden" means "1a. To offer (sth.)," but also "6a. To ask for (sth.), beg, demand, request . . . b. to pray." The verb "beien," which takes similar forms, is defined as, "a. to bend (sth.), bow (the head); 2a. To humble (one's heart, mind, etc.); 3a. To convert . . . To change (one's mind, someone's heart)." The verb that Nede actually uses, "abiden," even takes the extra sense of "8a. To expect . . . esp. to hope for, look forward to; to hope to see or hear or find (sth.)." It seems clear to me that the word here crystallizes for Langland a way of prayerfully inhabiting time or even, in the Augustinian vein, of inhabiting time as prayer. Nede is the poem's great spokesperson for this way of "abiding."

[50] Mann adduces Julian of Norwich's "tyme of oure nede" as an analogue at the end of her article ("The Nature of Need" 27).

[51] Adams does perhaps go a bit far when he suggests that "Langland's pessimism, too, sometimes seems bleaker than what the detached, scholarly tradition of Augustine would warrant" ("Some Versions" 197); but it must be admitted that Langland "seems" a lot of things, at different points in the poem.

Divine Comedy,[52] writing, "Where God is in *Piers Plowman* does not provide a comfortable ending to the narrative; it cannot, since the poem is about faith in this world, not sight in the next" (170). No amount of hopeful reading, I hope, will risk making *Piers Plowman* "comfortable."

What a more hopeful, "anagogical" reading of *Piers* does make possible is a keener attention to the chiastic pattern of the poem's ending, and to the way this ending throws light back on the whole rest of the work, "turning" it humbly toward joy. I noted above in passing that Bernard's thirty-third sermon on the *Song* set forth two distinct theories of history that seemed, at least on the surface, to contradict one another: one in which the sunrise of the resurrection—"a new beauty, with a more serene light than usual" ("novum . . . decorem, et sereniorem solito lucem") (33.6; I:237)—initiates a gradual growing in light that continues into Bernard's own day—"Since then the Sun has risen indeed, and has gradually poured down its rays over the earth; its light has begun to appear increasingly clearer, its warmth to be more perceptible" ("Sane ex tunc elevatus est sol, et sensim demum infundens suos radios super terram, coepit paulatim clarior apparere fervidiorque sentiri") (33.6; I:237)—and another, the more rigorously schematic, fourfold Augustinian model adduced by Adams, in which the trials of the church only get worse and worse until Christ comes and history is ended.[53] A much more modern theologian than Bernard, Ivan Illich, has reminded his readers of the place of the "mysterium iniquitatis" in

[52] The three circles that make up the Trinitarian "circulazion," says Dante, "mi parve pinta de la nostra effige" ("seemed to me painted with our effigy"). See *Paradiso*, Canto XXXIII, lines 127-31 (324-5). I have consulted Robin Kirkpatrick's edition and translation, cited in my Works Cited below.

[53] Bernard presents yet another model, or at least another metaphor, in his first sermon for Advent: "Evening was drawing on and the day was nearly over; the Sun of Righteousness had withdrawn just so far that his great brilliance and warmth could hardly be perceived. . . .Surely a fullness and abundance of temporal things had brought about a loss and forgetfulness of things eternal. Eternity came opportunely, when temporality was at its strongest" ("Vere enim advesperascebat et inclinata erat iam dies, recesserat paulo minus Sol iustitiae, ita ut exiguus nimis splendor eius aut calor esset in terris. . . .Nimirum plenitudo et abundantia temporalium oblivionem et inopiam fecerat aeternorum. Opportune ergo tunc advenit aeternitas, quando magis temporalitas praevalebat") (9; IV:167-8).

early Christian apocalyptic thought from the Second Letter to the Thessalonians on,[54] and so of the idea that the propagation of the Gospel itself had begotten a kind of anti-gospel that would eventually itself bring about the end of all things (169-70). If we keep something like this early, chiastic version of Christian eschatology in mind, it is possible to see the last passus of *Piers Plowman* as capturing this trajectory of simultaneous ascent toward the kingdom of God and descent toward the coming of Antichrist. Bernard's dual theory of church history, a distant echo of this "mysterium iniquitatis" model, seems to me a more satisfactory explanation of what is going on in this final passus, and in *Piers Plowman* more generally, than the more pessimistically and purely negative interpretations of Adams et al. A Nede who is at once a harbinger of Antichrist, a kind of neutral allegory for neediness and even bare hunger, and a really "redemptive principle" as Richard Firth Green describes him, is in a way as ominous as the anti-Nede critics suggest; only there is, as I have attempted to suggest, significantly more to the story.[55]

The priority of this chiastic, dual movement model of an "eschatalogical tension" or "way of desire" in *Piers Plowman* is thoroughly confirmed, in my view, by close attention to the specific language Langland uses to describe Nede, and doubly confirmed by perhaps the most significant intervention he made in revising the B-Text of the poem into the C-Text. In the

[54] See especially chapter two.

[55] Morton Bloomfield observed, in his influential study *Piers Plowman as a Fourteenth-century Apocalypse*, that "It is clear that there are apocalyptic elements in *Piers* and that the whole poem implies the hope of a better world which is predestined to solve the crisis of Langland's own time. . . .The sad state of the contemporary Church could be explained only on these grounds. God was planning, if not a new age, at least a renewal of the good and the just. The evil was the result of the birth throes of the good" (104-5). Anti-Nede critics like Adams have argued that this "better world" must be for Langland only the eschatological City of God, and not the Joachimist, literalized "renewal" in this world that Bloomfield and Kerby-Fulton have seen the poet as anticipating. Adams et al. rightly emphasize that Nede makes no promises of renewal. And yet Bloomfield's identification of something like "birth throes" at work in the poem seems to me a crucial insight, and one not done any justice to by Adams's more determinedly pessimistic reading. This raises the question of the specific quality of Langlandian hope, which I am attempting to address here.

former case, with a blistering bit of wordplay that constitutes the poem's most concentrated acrobatics around a single linguistic root, Nede declares:

> *Homo proponit, deus disponit;*
>
> God gouerneth all gode vertues.
>
> Ac Nede is nexst hym, for anoen he meketh
>
> And as louh as a lamb for lakkyng that hym nedeth,
>
> For Nede maketh neede fele nedes louh-herted.
>
> Philosopheres forsoke welthe for they wolde be nedy
>
> And woneden wel elyngly and wolden nat be riche. (C.XXII.33-9)

In the space of the middle three lines here "nede" moves from verb ("nedeth") to allegorized noun ("Nede") to nominalized adjective ("neede") to adverb ("nedes") and back to plain adjective ("nedy"), modeling in grammar the hopeful way of "abiding" in time that Nede's Christ explicitly theorizes.[56] Like Bernard's "face of Christ," the root word "nede" becomes itself the generative principle and object of desire that draws one on here, as Bernard might have put it, toward the true noontide; even as, on another allegorical plane, Langland may indeed intend to represent the book of Job's "egestas" that goes before the face of Leviathan.

This is where the ambivalence of Bernard's "noontide devil" and even of Gregory's twofold "egestas" makes a new, more dynamic reading of the poem's ending possible. The encounter with Nede, suspended as it is just on the cusp of the encounter with the "noontide devil"—who is, I believe, figured in Langland's poem not so much in the person of Nede himself, but rather in the temptation to reject him, and then in terms of the subsequent coming of

[56] I would compare this with the way, at the end of Augustine's *De Trinitate*, a single creative word is said to stretch out in time—only to gather up, in its anagogical scope, all of time into its eternal present. It is, so to speak, grammatically inflected; and yet still endlessly itself. This word is said to express the endless praise of the faithful, which is itself a kind of expression of dependence, or need (XV.28).

Antichrist, the flattery of the friars, and the forgetting of Contricioun to weep—represents a moment of obscure temptation that Bernard in his sermon was forced, in a similar way, to only indirectly represent. This is the temptation of the noonday devil, which Bernard could only describe in terms of Mary and Joshua and the Apostles' having feared demonic deception, while remaining in fact undeceived. The encounter with Nede is a similar moment of un-deception, and an elaborate trap for Will and the reader alike: a last temptation, in the face of one's own simple neediness, to despair of Christ's manifest presence in the poem.[57] The ambiguity of the noonday moment, as in Bernard's reading, is therefore preserved; there is no way to describe the temptation precisely, other than to say that one is tempted to put one's faith in something that is not God, and therefore to miss the possibility of encountering God in the flesh, in the face of Christ, at the true noontide.

In my view, the narrow exegetical schemes of the anti-Nede critics would fall under this heading, offering a deceptively compelling set of reasons to misrecognize Christ's presence. Discussing the parable of the Good Samaritan—so evidently dear to Langland—Illich writes:

> It has become almost impossible for people who today deal with ethics or morality to think in terms of relationships rather than rules. . . .The stress which the New Testament puts on relationship is also visible in the new account of virtue which appears amongst Christians. In the Platonic and Aristotelian teaching, virtue is something that I can cultivate in myself by the discipline of repeating good actions until they have become a second nature. . . .The flowering of [Christian] virtues, as evidenced by what Hugh [of St. Victor] calls the delicacy of their perfume, can come about only as a gift to me and not

[57] The figure of the noonday devil in fact originates in the experience of desert monks facing the temptation to despair of their hermetic commitments in the heat of noonday (Nault 28-30). This is another useful corrective to Adams's one-sided Gregorian reading of the figure, and to narrow exegetical readings in general.

> something which I can do on my own, as in classical tradition. Virtue in that view is very self-centered, building on my powers. Hugh presents the gifts of the Holy Spirit as gifts which come to me through those with whom I live. (52)[58]

Although I have argued that Robert Adams's foregrounding of the fourfold historical schema of St. Bernard is in fact essential for the structure of *Piers Plowman*'s final passus, Adams's specific application of that schema to the poem seems to me, in the last analysis, a fatal misreading—but one that, fascinatingly, Langland may be said almost to encourage. The encounter with Nede is not only a call to, but in effect also a test of, humility; one either admits to one's fundamental neediness—however unsettling its spokesperson may be—or else one constructs some defense, in Adams's case an admirably elaborate and exegetical one, against that admission. The critical aversion to Nede must be understood, then, as an especially

[58] In a similar vein, the contemporary theologian John Milbank recalls that "Augustine charged the Romans with having no real virtue, because they knew no real peace," and suggests, much like Nede, that "where virtue is conceived even in residually heroic terms . . . it will tend to reduce to a matter of self-control, whether of the soul, or of the city" (367). "Charity," on the other hand, Milbank writes, "does not, like prudence, really 'form' a passionate material that wells up from below; rather it produces its own material, shaping it according to its precise needs for every occasion" (364). As Aquinas famously argues, charity is the "form" of the virtues. Bernard himself exclaimed, in his fiftieth sermon on the Song of Songs, "How often for the sake of administering worldly affairs we very rightly omit even the solemn celebration of Masses! A preposterous order; but necessity knows no law. Love in action devises its own order, in accord with the command of the householder . . . swayed not by worldly values but by human needs" ("Quoties pro administrandis terrenis iustissime ipsis supersedemus celebrandis missarum solemniis! Ordo praeposterus; sed necessitas non habet legem. Agit ergo suum actualis caritas ordinem iuxta patrisfamilias iussionem . . . nec pretia consideret rerum, sed hominum necessitates") (50.5; II:81). There is perhaps a danger of over-emphasizing this ad hoc quality in Christian virtue: Jennifer Herdt's study *Putting on Virtue* warns against "early modern hyper-Augustinians" for whom "Even where some place remained for habituation or growth in charity . . . this had to be preceded by some moment of exclusively divine action on the passive human self"; in consequence, "A pure will, a pure heart, must first be given by God in some way outside of, and discontinuous with, ordinary moral psychology" (3). Herdt opposes this warped Augustinianism to "Erasmus's understanding of true virtue as developing through the imitation of Christ" (6). It seems to me that Langland and Bernard, pre-modern as they certainly are, both attempt to have it both ways. For Bernard, this is elaborated under the category of "experience"—as Illich suggests, something arrives "as a gift to me," in my experience, to which I must respond; there is therefore no virtue that is not fundamentally responsive (as opposed to purely "passive"). For Langland, the language of need, of prayer, and of "abyde"-ing carves out this middle space of gift and response. Even Herdt's Erasmian model seems to me to presuppose an essentially isolated subjectivity that must evaluate and manage its own virtuousness. As we will see in Chapters Two and Three, the Bernardine/Pseudo-Bernardine tradition in Middle English can be fairly accused of certain "hyper-Augustinian" tendencies.

presumptuous form of despair:[59] an elaborate scheme of the virtues, transposed onto an actually relevant apocalyptic scheme, is preferred to the admission of a fundamental neediness that is the poem's one condition for hope. As Bernard writes in his early treatise *De gratia et libero arbitrio* ("On Grace and Free Will"), "Besides, if the merits that we refer to as ours are rightly so called, then they are seed-beds of hope*,* incentives to love, portents of a hidden predestination, harbingers of happiness, the road to the kingdom, not a motive for playing the king. In one word: it is those whom he has made righteous, not those whom he found already righteous, that he has magnified" ("Alioquin si proprie appellentur ea, quae dicimus nostra, merita, spei sunt auaedam seminaria, caritatis incentiva, occultae praedestinationis inidicia, futurae felicitatis praesagia, via regni, non causa regnandi. Denique quos iustificavit, non quos iustos invenit, hos et magnificavit") (XIV.51; III:203). Likewise, according to Gregory the Great, the "true riches of the heavenly homeland" can only "return" to those who "remember themselves to be poor"; for those readers who reject this remembrance, the encounter with Nede does indeed become an encounter with "egestas reproborum" ("the need of the reprobate"). For those who do not, Nede becomes instead the "egestas electorum," the "need of the elect." The poem lets us decide.

Later on, in its final words of advice to the Dreamer—which follow on the words of Nede's Christ who "moet nede abyde" the sorrows that "shal to ioye torne"—Nede seizes specifically on this idea of "abiding" as a recommendation to Will of a certain way of inhabiting time: "Forthy be nat abasched to byde and to be nedy / Sethe he that wrouhte al the worlde was willefolliche nedy / Ne neuere noen so nedy ne porore deyede" (C.XXII.48-50). If Christ himself suffered time as a kind of prayerful interval of unfulfilled desire, Nede implicitly asks, why can't Will be content to do so? A similar question is posed, if only by Will to himself, in Langland's

[59] See Footnote 34 above for a brief recapitulation of the Bernardine teaching on presumption and despair, which Bernard understands as itself resulting from a kind of presumptuousness.

most significant addition to the C-Text, which is also the poem's closest formal analogue to the above wordplay with "nede." In this crucial passage, in which Will reveals more of his way of life and perhaps of his temperament than he does anywhere in the previous versions of the poem, it is explicitly stated, by Will himself, that his profession has been to "begge / Withoute bagge or botel but my wombe one" (C.V.51-2), in exchange for prayers for those who show him charity. He initially defends his choice of profession—"For in my consience Y knowe what Crist wolde Y wrouhte" (C.V.83), he assures Reason—but he is at once upbraided by Conscience himself, who, although he admits he "can nat se this lyeth," declares it "no sad parfitnesse in citees to begge, / But he be obediencer to prior or to mynistre" (C.V.89-91). Will responds:

> 'That is soth,' Y saide, 'and so Y beknowe
> That Y haue ytynt tyme and tyme myspened;
> Ac yut Y hope, as he that ofte hath ychaffared
> And ay loste and loste and at the laste hym happed
> A bouhte suche a bargayn he was the bet euere
> And sette al his los at a leef at the laste ende,
> Suche a wynnyng hym warth thorw wyrdes of grace:
>
> *Simile est regnum celorum thesauro abscondito in agro*.
>
> *Mulier que inuenit dragmam*.
>
> So hope Y to haue of hym that is almyghty
> A gobet of his grace and bigynne a tyme
> That alle tymes of my tyme to profit shal turne.' (C.V.92-101)

This passage, new to the C-Text of the poem, works in part to clarify the Nede episode later on. It makes it much more clear just what Nede is saying Will ought to simply "excuse" himself for

in that later passage: begging without excess accumulation ("Withoute bagge or botel") and following an obscure sense, identified with a "consience" that apparently conflicts with the allegorized Conscience himself at this point in the poem,[60] of "what Crist wolde Y wrouhte."[61] This new passage is also connected with the latter confrontation with Nede, and with the whole final passus of the poem, at a deeper thematic level, where the categories of "need" and "time" blur into one another. Like Nede's Christ who suffers "sorwes ful soure that shal to ioye torne," the Dreamer in his C-Text "apologia" to Conscience imagines a kind of eschatological turn or recoup of all his misspent time, a final "wynnyng" that will retroactively redeem all that has been lost so far; and yet this "time," like Augustine's God who must be in some sense known before He can be sought, is anticipated by Will almost as a kind of memory before the fact, a secondary and subsequent interpretation of a primary, given content that is already obscurely known in Will's "consience."[62] Like Nede's dizzying deployment of the word "nede" as almost every

[60] The divide between Will's conscience and Conscience itself is fascinating to a degree that I cannot deal with here. In his essay "Religious forms and institutions in *Piers Plowman*," James Simpson describes the "fact that Conscience errs in allowing Friar Flatterer into the church" in the poem's final passus (ignoring the advice of Nede) as "an acceptance of the limited vision, and the consequent check on anger, that Christ's own sufferance entails. That limited vision is a refusal of eschatological certainty and eschatological anger" (113). On the other hand, "Langland would seem to locate the source of reform in the individual conscience" (110). I will discuss the figure of Conscience more in Chapter Two.

[61] Langland's vocational crisis here is emblematic of what I would describe as a tension between "pilgrim" and "crusading" mentalities in Bernardine theology, a theme that I will explore at greater length in Chapter Two. It is only at the end of the poem, when Conscience "wol bicome a pilgrime" (C.XXII.380) and Will wakes up (perhaps) with Nede again, that the way is clear for Will to inhabit his role in the world without an overly scrupulous conscience that is, in a sense, "crusading" against itself, unable to accept the relative simplicity of what Holy Church asks of it. My metaphorical paradigm may apply here more literally than it would seem, since Langland did in fact have an association—perhaps even one of patronage—with the Despenser family, famous for their own crusade in Ghent against the anti-pope Clement VII (Kerby-Fulton 121). William E. Rogers convincingly argues that a number of revisions in the C-Text "emphasize the prelatical responsibility for dealing with the enemies against whom the crusades are being undertaken" ("The C-Revisions" 150). Along these lines, Langland's Liberum Arbitrium warns that, should the clergy not curb their covetousness, "clerkes of holi churche / Sholle ouerturne as the Templars dede, the tyme approcheth faste" (C.XVII.208-9). In carving out space for a "pilgrim" theology of need and a humbled conscience, then, Langland may have been literally defining himself against a "crusading" Christianity, still identified in his time with the Templars.

[62] Anne Middleton writes of this sequence: "imagined within the fictive narrative as launched at the moment in the poet's youth when habit (and *habitus*) were first challenged, then transformed into vocation rather than renounced, this new waking episode positioned early in the poem stands paradoxically within its production history as the poet's last word" (214). It is almost as if, in writing this final scene, the poet prays for his own past.

possible part of speech, the Dreamer's C-Text confession turns its own key word, here "tyme," into a kind of mantric prayer, expressing the desire for a "gobet of his grace" and a new kind of "tyme" more than it does any abstract conceptualization of Will's vocation and its conscientious timeliness (or lack thereof). There will be a new kind of "tyme," it starts to seem, simply because there needs to be.

There are, of course, significant differences between the two passages. Although the sense of the word changes throughout the course of Will's defense of himself, in Passus V of the C-Text the poet retains "tyme" as a static series of nouns, in what is in essence a kind of counter-syntax to the one later employed by Nede. This grammatical uniformity is paralleled on the conceptual level by a perhaps unpromising tendency of Will's to see time itself in terms of the monetary metaphor of gambling, as if a certain static quantity of time could be bartered for another. We are, after all—however late in the poem's history this passage may have been composed—still quite early on in the C-Text itself, and perhaps the Dreamer is to be understood as here still significantly far from the humbled state that he is, at least potentially, to achieve at the poem's end, in his climactic encounter with Nede. But this only makes it all the more essential to set this passage beside the Nede sequence, where the counter-mantra of "nede" proposes itself, even in its grammar, as something like the very alternative "tyme" the Dreamer hopes for early on in the C-Text of *Piers Plowman*—a way of "abiding" in which the past, present, and future of nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs are all hazarded in the "hope" for, even the need for, the grace that one should yet be permitted to "bigynne a tyme."

This new beginning in time would represent, in turn—as the Nede passage newly suggests in its new C-Text context—not only a new period in Will's life, but also a whole new way of inhabiting time as well, like Augustine's "way of desire" or Julian of Norwich's "tyme of

oure nede." *Piers Plowman* ends with a beginning: "Y gan awake" (C.XXII.386). This and other passages in the poem make a strong argument for identifying a purposeful manipulation of the poem's tempo and temporality towards its end, which in turn strengthens the connection I have made above between the two passages of time and of nede: the most evident formal marker of the poem's progress toward its own end times is its acceleration of the intervals between the dreamer's falling asleep and waking back up again, creating a kind of fast-forwarding time warp effect that coincides with the approach and eventual appearance of the apocalyptic figure of Nede. In a pattern that reaches its apex in the Nede sequence itself, where a scant fifty lines separate the dreamer's waking from his falling back asleep again, these intervals increasingly shorten as the poem nears its end. At the same time the dreamer's awakenings, previously in the poem described once only and then dispensed with, begin at Passus XX in the C-Text to double up: "riht with that Y wakede" (C.XX.468) pairs with "Thus Y wakede and wrot" (C.XXI.1) to describe, for the first time, the same awakening twice; likewise, "Y wakned therwith and wroet as me mette" (C.XXI.481) pairs with "as Y wente by the way, when Y was thus awaked" (C.XXII.1). This gives rise, on the one hand, to a thematization of the idea of "awakening"; coming awake comes to be depicted as not merely something you do and are done with, but rather as something you have to do again and again, sometimes just after you've done it. On the other hand, it also suggests a more fundamental breakdown in the way time has worked so far in the poem; time begins to catch on itself like a tape skipping in its tape head, and the frame of the poem itself becomes visible as some new temporality altogether, like Bernard's "true noonday," the face of Christ that is outside of all representation, begins to assert itself. This pattern hits its highest pitch with the poem's final and unique "Y gan awake" (C.XXII.386), which suspends *Piers Plowman* in a moment of awakening marked forever as something only yet "begun,"

something still—and for the poem at least, always—under way.[63] Its ending is thus appropriately "anagogic," in de Lubac's sense of incorporating at once the *futura* to come and the *invisibilia* that represent the eternal as already present now: it gestures toward eternity by means of a figure for an endless process of awakening that is always beginning again, "in this world" as Davlin put it, in time; the reader, in his or her response to the figure of Nede, is firmly caught up in this process. Although the Dreamer's "hope" to "bigynne a tyme" therefore seems to be prospectively fulfilled, the poem itself may be said—somewhat in the manner of Bernard's thirty-third sermon on the Song of Songs—to suspend itself, in a final display of hopeful temperance, in the "chastity" of desire.

[63] In Middle English "Y gan awake" often means just "I woke up," but my argument is more about the fact of the poem's ending on this moment of awakening than it is about than the specific grammatical idea of "beginning to awake." I am grateful to Christopher Baswell for pointing this out to me.

Chapter 2

The Two Bernards

Tensions in Bernardine theology and its literary heirs

A great philosophy is not that which passes final judgments, which takes a seat in final truth. It is that which introduces uneasiness, which opens the door to commotion.

— Charles Péguy, "Note on M. Bergson"

The previous chapter's reading of *Piers Plowman* in terms of one of Bernard of Clairvaux's *Sermons on the Song of Songs* assumes a certain stability to Bernard's thinking, reading Langland in light of a given lens that is supplied by an exemplary text from Bernard's masterwork. This seemed to me useful because I believe Bernardine theology can illuminate certain key features that have been misunderstood in the literary texts under its influence, and because *Piers* explicitly engages with the Bernardine and Pseudo-Bernardine traditions I will be grappling with for the remainder of this dissertation. However, it is also potentially misleading. If I have depicted *Piers Plowman* as a poem riven with generative contradictions—perhaps best encapsulated by the late addition, in the C-Text, of a scene in which the dreamer Will cites the dictates of his "consience" against the allegorical figure of Conscience itself (C.V.83)—I will clarify in this chapter that the thought of Bernard of Clairvaux was itself laced with fault lines and fissures. The mystical, what I have termed "anagogical" quality in his writings is aptly

embodied in his thirty-third sermon on the *Song of Songs*,[1] and is a major element in his thought that, in my view, fourteenth and fifteenth-century Middle English literary authors from Langland to Julian of Norwich to Chaucer to Malory attempted, in their different ways, to re-boot and re-capture. But in order to understand Bernard, it is necessary to keep in mind that this element is itself internally conflicted, marking nothing less than the attempt to inhabit a certain kind of tension as fulfillment. This is the tension that Bernard characterizes in terms of "memory," "time," and the "reflection" of the "face of Christ" that intimates the ambiguous presence of the eternal in time, "noontide light," even in its very apparent absence. It is characteristic of a Bernardine "pilgrim" theology, content to remain within the ambiguity of this "interim" period, as opposed to more "crusading" attempts to collapse the interval between present *saeculum* and eternal Kingdom of God: "Meanwhile I have to be content with the husk of the sacrament, with the bran of the flesh, with the chaff of the letter, with the veil of faith" ("Me oportet interim quodam sacramenti cortice esse contentum, carnis furfure, litterae palea, velamine fidei") (33.3; I:235), Bernard says in the sermon on the Song of Songs I analyzed Chapter One. As we will see in this chapter, this is not necessarily a tension that Bernard himself always maintained.

This is also the quality in Bernard's thought that led Caroline Walker Bynum to describe what she calls Bernard's "sense of radical doubleness," which she critiques as a sign of Bernard's insufficiently historical, unresolvedly dualistic thinking (*Metamorphosis* 249).[2] This is

[1] I am hesitant to put much weight on the term "mystical" because it is not one that Bernard used in this way. Denys Turner's study of apophatic theology, *The Darkness of God*, argues that "mysticism" is in an important sense a modern invention, which only makes sense in a context where theology as a speculative endeavor has been separated out from its roots in religious experience (7). I think Bernard's "theology of experience" is strongly resistant to this kind of separation.

[2] The charge of dualism is not one that Bynum makes herself, but seems to me the theological corollary of her critique of "doubleness." She notes how for Bernard the language of "mixture" typically signals disgust. However, Bynum also points out that "Bernard's most complex rhetorical contrast is *admiratio*/*imitatio*," and that the experience of "admiratio" is often tied for Bernard to the encounter with various startling mixtures: "As Bernard explained: when we are offered a golden goblet, we consume, absorb, incorporate the drink (that is, imitate the virtues), but we give back (that is, we wonder at) the goblet. Thus we wonder at what we cannot in any sense

a thoughtful critique, characteristic of many contemporary critical reactions to Bernard, and one that will occupy the rest of this chapter. I should say at the outset, however, that I do not believe it is correct. In fact, I think the essence of what Bernard contributes to those literary authors under his sway is lost in this reading, and that Bynum's view of Bernard is in fact symptomatic of fatal mis-readings of the saint that were already underway in his time. To be fair to Bynum and to Bernard's other mis-interpreters, it is a mis-reading that Bernard, somewhat like Langland, at times may be said to encourage. It is Bernard's ceaseless drive toward tension, and ultimately "eschatological tension" in Rowan Williams's phrase,[3] that makes it so easy to mistake his many dualistic formulations for real dualism, and his many binaries for what Bynum describes in terms of a "nameless hybrid" (127), lacking a "sense of midpoint or median" (129). As Denys Turner has recently argued of Julian of Norwich, much of what Bernard says needs to be understood as inextricable from its rhetorical context, and so as a series of hypothesized contradictions that the saint sets out to prospectively resolve without simply reducing.[4] Bynum herself suggests something like this when she observes that Bernard is concerned with "Paradox,

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incorporate, or consume, or encompass in our mental categories; we wonder at mystery, at paradox, at *admirabiles mixturae*. The ecstasy and stupor Bernard calls *admiratio* is triggered above all, he says, by three hybrids beyond nature and comprehension: the mixture of God and man, of woman and virgin, of belief with falsity in our hearts" (*Metamorphosis* 53). In other words, Bernard's "radical doubleness" at its height is tied to a perception of the impossible paradoxes at the core of the Christian faith. It should be understood, I think, as an attempt to do justice to them.

[3] I cited Williams's critique of Bernard's tendency to collapse "the eschatological tension between Church and society" in Chapter One ("Three Styles" 28). As my reading of the songs of Jaufre Rudel below will demonstrate, I think Williams is right to observe that Bernard's more ideological writings, and especially his crusade preaching, tend to break down on this score. But I also think that Bernard is, as the thirty-third sermon on the Song of Songs demonstrates, the great theologian of personal and ecclesiological "eschatological tension" in the homiletic genre.

[4] Turner argues, for instance, that Julian's "godly" and "beastly" wills need to be understood in this way; that is, that Julian does not suggest that the soul is finally divided into two wills, one good and one bad, but that, given our presently incomplete, sinful condition, we operate as if it were. This is, as Turner puts it, "the experiential by-product of a fundamental fracture in the human condition" (*Julian of Norwich* 206). Patricia Dailey clarifies how even though these wills may be "parallel constructs—one reflecting the image of God, the other reflecting the promise of the divine in a temporal medium—the lower will may misalign itself in relation to the higher potential of the divine will" (169). Karl F. Morrison has described the tendency to emphasize rather than elide these tensions in Bernard's writing in terms of "enigma." John Bugbee has more recently defended Bernard on this score in terms of "paradox." I would suggest the use of the term "mystery" in the technical sense in which the word was originally used to describe the sacraments. As a sacramental theologian Bernard is firmly on the side of the mysterious.

not process" (161);[5] the saint routinely entertains hypothetical perspectives in a quest to capture the drama of struggling for salvation in time, where nothing can be finally resolved, where the world often looks to us to be split in two, and the soul often seems to be wandering in a "regio dissimilitudinis" ("realm of unlikeness").[6] Whereas Bynum views Bernard's "hybrid monstrosities" as symptomatic of an overly static resistance to real change, or what she terms "metamorphosis," his impact on the late medieval authors I am analyzing suggests that the effect of this hybrid quality may have been the opposite of this. In the hands of later vernacular authors like Langland, Chaucer, Julian of Norwich, and Malory, the problems and tensions that are embodied in Bernard's sermons and sayings, as they are filtered down through manuscript transmission, *florilegia*, and secondhand vernacular sources like the popular *Prick of Conscience*,[7] become themselves fertile seedbeds of change, invitations to thinking toward a richly vernacular theology that enacts, if only *in ovo*, a real metamorphosis in Christian thought.

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[5] G.R. Evans draws attention to the way "Bernard came to enjoy paradoxes. He discovered them everywhere, in the writings of the Fathers, in Scripture itself, in the demands of daily life. He held them up to his listeners as jewels sparkling with divine mystery. . . .Bernard's treatises rest upon a series of grand paradoxes, within which he explores a multitude of smaller ones. . . .they do not alarm him. He is confident in his power to use them to bring a point home to the reader with the vividness only amazement can produce." Like Alan of Lille in his poem "Rithmus de incarnatione Domini," Bernard "speaks of the *salubris copula*" as a way of understanding the mediating power of the Word, "the *copula* which links the disparate parts of every proposition" (*The Mind of St. Bernard* 219-21). In his treatise *De consideratione* Bernard advises Pope Eugenius III that "There is a useful connection [*salubris copula*] between thinking of yourself as Supreme Pontiff and paying equal attention to the vile dust that you not only were, but are. Your thoughts should imitate nature, and what is more worthy, should imitate the Author of nature, in joining what is highest with what is lowest. Did not nature in the person of man join the breath of life with vile dust? Did not the Author of nature, in the person of himself mix together the dust of the earth and the Word? Thus, take your model both from the substance of our origin and from the mystery of redemption" ("Salubris copula, ut cogitans te Summum Pontificem, attendas pariter vilissimum cinerem non fuisse, sed esse. Imitetur cogitatio naturam; imitetur et, quod dignius est, Auctorem naturae, summa imaque consocians. Nonne natura in persona hominis vili limo vitae spiraculum colligavit? Nonne Auctor naturae in sui persona Verbum limumque contemperavit? Ita tibi sume formam tam de nostrae concretione originis quam de sacramento redemptionis") (II.18; III:426).

[6] As I note in Chapter One, this is an Augustinian phrase that Bernard co-opts to describe the sense of dislocation that human sinfulness engenders. Étienne Gilson's *The Mystical Theology of Saint Bernard* broke significant ground in drawing attention to this (in fact infrequently occurring) phrase in Bernard's work. See Gilson's *Mystical Theology* for an extended meditation on the significance of this phrase for Bernard (33-59).

[7] Christopher Holdsworth's survey "The Reception of St Bernard in England" concludes that, by the time of the *Ancrene Wisse*'s composition in the early thirteenth century, "the abbot of Clairvaux was indeed wellknown and loved, both by people who had Latin and those who did not, he was part of the spiritual landscape" (176).

As Bernard himself says in his treatise *De gratia et libero arbitrio* ("On Grace and Free Will"), "we are reformed in Christ into a spirit of freedom" ("reformamur per Christum in spiritum libertatis") (XIV.49; III:201). This is the story of that spirit's movement.

It is not, however, a story that is without its complications. This chapter will explore those complications in as concentrated a form as possible. I will look for "radical doubleness" in *Piers Plowman*; in the songs of the troubadour Jaufre Rudel, whose songs uniquely serve as a point of possibly direct contact with Bernard's preaching; and—looking forward to the arrival of Bernard's writings in England—a Latin treatise that circulated widely there under Bernard's name: the *Meditationes piissimae de cognitione humanae conditionis* ("Pious Meditations on the Understanding of the Human Condition"). In general, I will argue that it is an inauthentic, distorted Bernardinism that implicates itself in various dualisms in the way Bynum describes, and so suggest that Bernard's authentic thought is marked by its pushing through and past its paradoxes to intimate something of the "noontide light" in its mysterious abiding in time. Even so, there is undoubtedly something dark and conflicted in Bernard's rhetorical and intellectual DNA that the Christian tradition has found ceaselessly fascinating, whether it is celebrated by Martin Luther or regretted as an unfortunate medieval regression by Rowan Williams.[8] He is, as Brian Patrick McGuire has put it, the "difficult saint," and he deserves to be handled in all his difficulty. This chapter sets out to ensure that the problems that are worked out partly through the creative repurposing of the figure of Bernard in later writers are understood as problems, in all their urgency and apparent intractability, first. For heuristic purposes, it may be helpful here to

[8] As Bernard McGinn points out in his Introduction to Bernard's treatise *On Grace and Free Choice*, "after St Augustine, Bernard was Luther's most admired theologian." McGinn also discusses "Luther's distinction between Bernard the preacher and Bernard the disputant," concluding that it is a false one (45). This chapter makes a slightly different distinction between Bernard the mystic and Bernard the crusader. Beyond Williams, Geraldine Heng describes Bernard as an advocate of religious "genocide" (115).

speak of two Bernards: the mystical abbot responsible for the *Sermons on the Song of Songs* and *On Loving God*, identified by Williams as "some of the finest analyses of the life of supernatural charity to come from the pen of any Christian writer"; and the crusade preacher Williams describes as the "one of the first great ideologists of the mediaeval Western church" ("Three Styles" 36). In order to understand Bernard, it is necessary to understand both of these figures, and to hold them in productive tension, as we examine his wide-ranging influence in the vernacular.

"Redde quod debes": Theological fault lines in Langland and Bernard

I have argued in Chapter One that Langland's *Piers Plowman* ultimately, if haltingly, outlines a theology of need, recapturing the spirit of the early Christian *Didache* by way of a detour through Bernardine thinking on the primacy of self-knowledge and the importance of understanding oneself as utterly dependent, or "needy," as the foundation for all the other virtues.[9] This is what Langland's Imaginatif describes in terms of the "chaste"-ing of the "shrew."[10] I did not spend as much time describing the other side of this tension: the extent to which *Piers Plowman* appears at times to be haunted by an almost overwhelming sense of the soul's unpayable debt to God and to others,[11] which oscillates wildly with the simple ethic of neediness set out by Holy Church in the poem's first passus. This preoccupation is nicely encapsulated by Langland's use of the phrase "redde quod debes," a refrain that recurs

[9] Bernard sometimes states the primacy of humility and acknowledged neediness very starkly, as in his second sermon on the Purification: "we have the greatest need of the greatest virtue, humility" ("humilitatis virtus maxima maxime necessaria est") (3; IV:340).
[10] In her book *Piers Plowman and the Moderni* Janet Coleman makes the interesting suggestion, which I did not address in Chapter One, that Imaginatif may be meant to embody the speculative nominalism of Ockham and the *moderni*. I will discuss Langland's relationship with fourteenth-century theology in more detail below.
[11] As Richard Firth Green puts it, "the dreamer is obsessed by a paradox he finds at the very heart of the baptismal contract. Dowel . . . is either possible for sinful humanity or it is not. If it is not, how can God justly enter into a contract whose fulfillment is impossible?" (*A Crisis of Truth* 363).

throughout the penultimate passus of both B- and C-Texts of the poem and that appears in its original context in scripture in an oddly inauspicious place: the Parable of the Servant in Matthew Chapter 18.[12] In this parable, Jesus tells the story of a servant who, having asked his master and creditor for "patientia" and received it, nonetheless holds his own debtor ruthlessly accountable for what he owes, exclaiming "Redde quod debes!" ("Return what you owe") (Matt. 18.28) and throwing him into jail until he can pay back the whole sum. It is obviously a story of how one should not behave, and even comes with a clear warning that the one who does not forgive his debtors will be held accountable for the "universum debitum" ("whole debt"). This makes it very strange that the next to last passus of *Piers Plowman* seems to settle on this phrase as a salutary call to repentance. It is not clear whether Langland is aware of the scriptural tension built into the phrase, but, as the tearing of the pardon scene in the B-Text vividly illustrates,[13] he is clearly aware of, and sensitive to, similar tensions in Christian theology in general: in particular, a tension between theologies that emphasize the importance of works and God's justice and those that emphasize his mercy and grace.[14] In any case, Langland is deeply concerned with the question of what one owes to God, and how the model of debt can or can't be mapped onto a religion in which the master is supposed to forgive the servant, and the request for patience is always meant to be heard.[15]

[12] Eleanor Johnson's article "*Reddere* and Refrain" argues that "Langland's repetition of *reddere* . . . does not create stable, fixed, extractable meanings through the action of argumentation or cumulative reasoning; instead, it is associative and non-linear, and it creates palimpsestic interpretive crises more often than paraphraseable lessons" (4). We must think of the "*reddere* repetitions," she argues, as "poetic refrains" (6). My reading follows this procedure, arguing that the instability of the refrain's relationship with scripture instigates one of the great interpretive crises in the poem.

[13] See B.VII.1-105 for the pardon scene.

[14] Drawing on the work of John Alford and Judson Boyce Allen, Johnson observes, "It is clear . . . that Langland derives his clusters of citations around particular lexemes from trawling through concordances, *distinctiones*, or commentaries" ("*Reddere*" 6). It therefore seems unlikely that he was unaware of the tension here.

[15] This comes to the surface for the first time in a major way in the poem in the fourth passus of the C-Text, where the distinction between "mede" and "mercede" is examined.

Whether it is used with an awareness of its negative scriptural connotations or not, "redde quod debes" shows up at moments in *Piers Plowman* where the question of what one owes to God, and how one pays it, is at least implicitly raised and complicated. A close examination of its several appearances in the poem will make Langland's attitude toward these questions, and so toward a form of "dualism" embedded in this scriptural refrain—one that would threaten to separate God's justice from his mercy, demanding a recompense separate from the context of God's love—more clear. When it occurs in *Piers* for the first time, the phrase is used by Conscience to describe Christ's giving St. Peter the power of pardon after Pentecost as the "do best" of Conscience's brief recapitulation of the life of Christ. In this passage, the practice of sacramental penance is depicted as the "return" that makes forgiveness possible:

> And whan this dede was doen, do best he thouhte
> And yaf Peres pardoun and power he graunted hym,
> Myhte men to assoyle of alle manere synnes,
> To alle manere men mercy and foryeuenesse
> In couenaunt that they come and knoleched to pay
> To Peres pardoun the ploughman *Redde quod debes*. (C.XXI.182-7)

The phrase is originally introduced into the poem here with reference to the founding of the institutional Church via the granting of the power of "pardoun" to Piers. Conscience immediately clarifies that Piers has "power, be his pardoun payed, / To bynde and to vnbynde bothe here and elles / And assoile men of alle synnes, saue of dette one" (C.XXI.188-90). He then imagines Christ returning to reward "hym riht wel that *reddet quod debet*, / Payeth parfitly as puyr treuthe wolde. / And what persone payth hit nat punischen he thenketh" (C.XXI.193-5). When the phrase next occurs in the passus, it is imagined that Conscience will be crowned King and Grace

will, it says, make "Peres the plouhman my procuratour and my reue / And registrer to reseyuen *Redde quod debes*. / … / And for to tulye treuthe a teme shal he haue" (C.XXI.258-61). This associates the phrase with another litany of institutional formations—procurator, reeve, registrar, purveyor, plowman—and with the overburdened word "treuthe," which itself may carry connotations of traditional authority.[16] Its third and final appearance comes just before the crisis that precedes and sets the stage for the poem's frantic final passus:

> Grace thorw godes word gaf Peres the plouhman power,
> Mythe to make hit and men for to eten hit aftur
> In helpe of here hele ones in a monthe
> Or as ofte as they hadden nede, tho that hadden payed
> To Peres pardon the plouhman *Redde quod debes*. (C.XXI.386-90)

This injunction immediately sets off a revolution from below: "'How?' quod alle the comune, 'thow conseylest vs to yelde / Al that we owen eny wyhte or that we go to hosele?'" (C.XXI.391-2). Conscience says yes, and the rest is history: the "comune" revolts, Will wakes back up, and the ambiguous figure of Nede arrives to set the scene for Antichrist and the attack on Conscience's barn of Unite.

There is clearly a meditation here on the meaning of debt, both sacramental and otherwise,[17] but there is also a very deliberate picture painted of an institutional church with real

[16] Richard Firth Green's *A Crisis of Truth*, which I will discuss in more detail below, suggests that this word is a major semantic battleground in the late Middle Ages in England, staging a transition from "an illusion of communal coherence founded on ethical truth" to "the unwavering insistence of written evidence on a depersonalized intellectual truth" (39).

[17] It is worth pointing out in this connection that Langland refers to the Pauline phrase, "Reddite ergo omnibus debita" ("Therefore pay your debts to all") (Romans 13:7) (C.VI.315), in conjunction with the Augustinian reminder that "*Numquam dimmitur peccatum, nisi restituatur ablatum*" ("Sin is never remitted, unless what was stolen is restored") (C.VI.257), in an earlier passage exploring the themes of penitence and satisfaction. The latter phrase is later referenced by the Samaritan in his own discourse on repentance (C.XIX.290). This makes it more plausible that the phrase "redde quod debes" is meant to be heard as a much harsher, perhaps even a misguided, way of demanding that one do penance. It at least seems clear that the phrase captures, as James Simpson says of Nede, a "matter of

limitations. In other words, it is not at all clear that Langland is straightforwardly on the side of Conscience. The beginning of Conscience's account of the founding of the Church is colored with a *Christus victor* vision of "Iesus the ioustare" (C.XXI.10) and "Crist with his croes, conquerour of cristene" (C.XXI.14). This was already a somewhat outdated model in Langland's time,[18] and we may be meant to feel that Conscience's instinctive recourse to the language of courtly chivalry and royal power—"Thou knowest wel," he says when Will asks him to explain the name of Christ, "That knyht, kyng, conquerour may be o persone" (C.XXI.26-7)—colors his whole account, including the odd description of "do wel" at the wedding at Cana in terms of a demonstration of "lawe and lyf-holinesse" (C.XXI.111), the definition of Christ's "Dobet" in terms of his sheer miraculous power, and the ultimate association of "Dobest" in the life of Christ with the penitential system of the church, rather than with the passion, the resurrection, or the sending of the Holy Spirit. The mounting sense that Conscience may be a somewhat over-sanguine company man comes to a head when he exclaims, near the end of his speech, "Y care nat now . . . thow Pryde come nouthe; / The lord of lust shal be ylette al this lente" (C.XXI.381-2). This overconfident assertion comes just before the final use of the phrase "redde quod debes" in the poem and the immediate revolt of the commons, and seems an obviously ironic

great intellectual tension" for Langland (*Piers Plowman* 205-6). Green points out that F.W. Maitland described the early English common law as missing the "vast gulf which to our mind divides the 'Give me what I own' and 'Give me what I am owed'" (*A Crisis of Truth* 47). What God "owns" would seem to be not sin, but the soul itself. A usage in this vein occurs in Bernard's first sermon for the Feast of All Saints, when the saint observes that Adam, had he "thirsted for righteousness," "would doubtless have been anxious to give back what he owed, not only to his wife but much more to his Creator" ("si esurisset iustitiam, curasset sine dubio reddere quod debebat, non solum uxori, sed multo magis Creatori"). What he owed to God in this case, Bernard says, was "obedience and subjection" ("oboedientiam atque subiectionem") (11; V:336).

[18] Green points out how Langland also espouses a "pre-Anselmian soteriology" that depicts "the redemption as a legal process . . . , which makes Langland . . . vulnerable . . . to Anselm's refutation of the devil's rights theory." Green does not think Langland naively adopts this position, but rather prefers it as intimating something that is difficult to capture discursively (*A Crisis of Truth* 360-1).

manifestation of pride at work in its very disavowal. In all his institutional bravado, Conscience has forgotten about his own susceptibility to sin.

Richard Firth Green has described the tension that is illustrated here in more intellectual-historically situated terms, which in turn help relate this set of questions back to the figure of Bernard. Green's landmark study *A Crisis of Truth* draws attention to a consequential divide between "covenantal" theologies in which God is seen in a sense as owing something to mankind due to the covenant he has made with it, and those in which an emphasis on God's incommensurable power leads to a denial of the idea that God may be said to owe anything to anyone. As Green's chief theological source William J. Courtenay points out, the late medieval nominalists with whom Langland is sometimes associated can be understood in terms of a desire to restore the sense that God had meaningfully committed himself to his creation, and so "often interpreted the covenant of salvation in the sense that God was a debtor, committed to reward with grace, and, eventually, with eternal life the man who did what was in him" ("Covenant and Causality" 118). This would seem to square with a reading of *Piers* in terms of an undercurrent of resistance to the idea that institutional forms of satisfaction, particularly when they are imagined in terms of a one-sided debt, can rightly stand at the center of the Christian life. It also suggests how Langland may have had a tendency to promote a more cooperative model of God's relationship with his creation, and aligns with various "semi-Pelagian" readings of the poem that stress the poet's sympathy with the Lollards and other radical reform movements.[19]

However, this is not the whole story. The sensitivity of Green's reading lies in his reaching back beyond the nominalists to Anselm of Canterbury's earlier "assault on covenantal theology," where the "reciprocity of the covenant between God and humanity" was denied—

[19] David Aers summarizes and disputes the ascription of semi-Pelagianism in his book *Salvation and Sin* (84-8).

since, according to Anselm, "God owes nothing to anyone; rather, all creatures are in his debt. Thus it is not fitting for human beings to act toward God as if with an equal" (*Cur Deus Homo*, 1.19). In this view, "divine promises" had to be seen as "conferring only a debt of gratitude, never rights" (Green, *A Crisis of Truth* 352). Even further back, beyond this eleventh-century model, Green identifies a strongly covenantal confidence in the efficacy of baptism premised on the "interweaving of divine contracts," a strain that persists in lay religiosity long after Anselm's time, and that is still recognizable in the Middle English sermons of John Mirk (343).[20] This is what leads Green to argue that, while "Langland's covenantalism" may owe something of its "articulation" to the nominalists and *moderni*, "its roots run far deeper than the Oxford schools of his youth" (376). Questioning whether Anselm's original reaction against the covenantal model may not have had something to do with a "growing authoritarianism in both church and state" (350), and so with a desire to stress the absolute power of the one divine ruler,[21] Green therefore sees *Piers Plowman* as reaching back behind both this implicitly authoritarian model and the in their own way infamously divine *potentia*-stressing theologies of the nominalists, for whom "an omnipotent God owes us nothing *de potentia absoluta*," though "we may still have complete faith in his commitment to honor his promises *de potentia ordinata*" (356). In this respect, Langland shows a strong "sympathy for a theology of entitlement that was omnipresent in

[20] Green observes: "The guarantee of salvation for those that keep their covenant with God is theologically . . . problematical . . . , but Mirk offers such a guarantee quite explicitly." He illustrates his claim with an example from a sermon for the circumcision in which Mirk depicts mankind and God as servant and master, bound to each other by the one-time, two-way covenant of baptism (*A Crisis of Truth* 343).

[21] G.R. Evans notes that, "Where Anselm thought in terms of God's having raised the humanity in Christ to one with his divinity, Bernard was speaking for his own contemporaries in talking of the 'descent' and humiliation involved. He insists that so startling an act, so extreme a departure from immutability into mutability, as God's becoming man, could only be accounted for by a compelling necessity" (*The Mind of St. Bernard* 158). Bernard does not necessarily downplay God's ultimate "authoritarianism," but he does more dramatically depict the descent of the ruler into his creation. Evans also notes that, in their contrasting treatments of the battle between the vices and the virtues, "Anselm could evidently tell a good story," but "the more schematic accounts of his tales and their perhaps cooler atmosphere suggest that he was less gifted than Bernard at creating suspense and carrying the audience breathlessly with him. . . .Bernard was first and foremost a preacher" (68).

traditional culture" (371), and that was innocent of this distinction in the "powers" of God—a theology something like the one Jill Mann argues for, when she stresses the way Langland's God identifies with the barest particulars of human neediness.[22]

Piers Plowman is not ultimately, then, a nominalist or "modern" poem so much as one that attempts to depict and provisionally respond to the breakdown in theological systems to which these movements themselves responded. Langland calls into question theologies to that would, in the case of Anselm, deny the covenantal nature of God's commitment to his creation, or, in the case of the nominalists, introduce a distinction into the nature of God that would seem to compromise that covenant even as it seeks to preserve it. This implies that Langland was acutely sensitive to the theological currents of his time, but also committed to certain lay forms of religiosity that cannot necessarily be squared in any simple way with even the Anselmian innovations, much less the nominalist ones. It also explains some of the ambiguity of his passus depicting the founding of Holy Church: the complications of the old, fiercely covenantal *Christus victor* model are both sympathetically depicted and ultimately seen as inadequate to the challenges of Langland's time: "And thow, Consience," Langland's "lewed vicory" charges, "in kynges court and sholdest neuer come thennes" (C.XXI.424)—in other words, if you like the King so much, you should stay with him. Langland is therefore both in a sense more traditional than the nominalists and, as I have suggested in my reading of the phrase "redde quod debes" above, just as, if not more, committed to working beyond the ossified, overly simple identification of the church with institutional formations, and with a version of the "cardinale virtues" (C.XXI.393) that too often coincided with the interests of the "cardinale that . . . cam fro the pope" (C.XXI.413). From this point of view, the command to "return what you owe" would

[22] See Mann's essay "Eating and Drinking in *Piers Plowman*" for a summary of this view.

speak less to a unilateral demand for satisfaction than to a mutuality that would really offer "To alle manere men mercy and foryeuenesse," in a "couenaunt" that has less to do with payment and pardons than with God's commitment to return, if not what he owes, than what he has promised, to his creation.[23]

There was in Langland's time at least one strong, already by his time traditional theological current that spoke clearly and influentially to this set of concerns. As Green observes but does not develop, St. Bernard is, bar none, the most prominent medieval voice for a theological stance that remains deeply covenantal while also uncomplicated by the later, "modern" split between the powers of God.[24] This is, on the intellectual level, what makes him the ideal figure for a close study of vernacular theology as it is embodied in literary texts like *Piers Plowman*, *The Canterbury Tales*, and the *Morte Darthur*: Bernard is an unquestionably revered, unimpeachably traditional authority who is nonetheless identified with, and actually taught, a form of covenantal Christianity that remained latent in lay religiosity throughout the late Middle Ages, and that still shows up everywhere in the era's most popular literary productions. This aspect in Bernard's thought comes through particularly clearly in his view of the sacraments: while Aquinas argued for the eventually orthodox idea of "instrumental causality," which stipulated that "the sacraments of the New Law not merely signify but actually

[23] Nicholas Watson's article "Visions of Inclusion: Universal Salvation and Vernacular Theology in Pre-Reformation England" offers an analogous reading of *Piers Plowman*, while pushing its soteriological implications further than I do. Patricia Dailey's book *Promised Bodies* helps to clarify what I mean by "promised" with reference to specifically mystical experience: "the mystic undergoes what I call an *unlived* experience, an experience that does not find its roots in the time and place of the body proper, or the time and space of the here and now, but in the inner body and a promise that will unfold itself in time while never being entirely realized. This unlived experience, the experience of union with God, is experienced as a *promise* of union. . . .Augustine and Paul provide the mystic text with a sense of the atemporal, that is, the eternal time of God, which is manifest in the perspective of the present, and in how a moment outside of time may be hosted by a moment in time without ever being reduced to it" (24). Covenantal theology seeks to extend this sense of eternal promise into the sphere of everyday life.

[24] Green describes "Bernard's view of the sacraments as the symbolic clothing of a spiritual pact" (*A Crisis of Truth* 356).

cause grace" (*Summa Theologiae*, IIIa, q. 62, a. 1, resp.), Bernard subscribed to a "*sine qua non*" model of sacramental causality that, according to Courtenay, reflects a belief that God's grace "operates according to a pact or covenant" ("Sacrament, Symbol" 117). To illustrate, Green compares Bernard's view of the sacraments with the "tokens used in trothplight," such as a ring used to mark the transfer of the title of an estate: the signs of trothplight are invested with meaning in a way that seems more additive than transubstantial (*A Crisis of Truth* 355), modeling a form of "ascribed" rather than "inherent" virtue that is nonetheless just as "effective" (Courtenay, "Sacrament, Symbol" 117).[25] As Courtenay puts it, the sacraments in this view are "common things that receive their new significance by having an additional value applied or ascribed to them by some person . . . , by some agreement or covenant, or by their recognized use in a particular ceremony" ("Sacrament, Symbol" 114). In stressing the formal execution of the ritual, Aquinas's instrumental model "minimized the covenantal implications of the sacraments in the interests of promoting divine, or (the skeptic might suggest) ecclesiastical, authority" (Green, *A Crisis of Truth* 356). Bernard, on the other hand, states clearly that "God is not free to reject those who have been baptized and who desire salvation" (Courtenay, "Sacrament, Symbol" 116), and emphasizes the covenantal efficacy of the sacraments in a way that would seem to restrict even the freedom of God, not to mention ecclesiastical authority.[26] Likewise,

[25] Bernard's sermon for the Lord's Supper, to which Courtenay refers here, outlines this point of view: "A sacrament is a sacred sign or a sacred rite. Many things are done simply for their own sake, but others in order to represent other things, and these are called signs and are indeed so. Let us take an example from everyday life. A ring is given purely as a ring and has no significance; but if it is given as a token of some hereditary office it is a sign, so that the one who receives it may now say, 'In itself, the ring has no value, but it denotes the hereditary office I was seeking'" ("Sacramentum dicitur sacrum signum, sive sacrum secretum. Multa siquidem fiunt propter se tantum, alia vero propter alia designanda, et ipsa dicuntur signa, et sunt. Ut enim de usualibus sumamus exemplum, datur anulus absolute propter anulum, et nulla est significatio; datur ad investiendum de hereditate aliqua, et signum est, ita ut iam dicere possit qui accipt: 'Anulus non valet quidquam, sed hereditas est quam quaerebam.'") (2; V:68). In the same sermon, Bernard refers to Christ's washing the disciples' feet as "done as a sacrament and not merely as an example," because in it "something that is necessary for salvation is hidden" ("pro sacramento illud est, non pro solo exemplo factum. . . .Aliquid igitur latet quod necessarium est ad salutem") (4; V:71).

[26] The point here is not to argue that Aquinas's model of sacramental causality is insufficient; it is to bring out the somewhat sidelined strengths of Bernard's point of view. Bernard McGinn points out that, while "Some later

Bernard seems untroubled by Aquinas's concern that the sacraments be seen to "merely signify"; it does not even seem thinkable to him yet that there should be anything "mere" about the "visible signs that call forth the gift of grace on the basis of a value attributed to them by God" (117).[27] In this respect, as I have suggested in Chapter One, it seems useful to think of Langland as straining backwards toward something like a Bernardine equilibrium, however tense, while remaining aware of and alive to contemporary debates. He does, of course, think mankind really owes something to God; but he is committed to a deeply covenantal, and in an important way almost semiotic, "visible sign"-based model of the mystery of what that means.[28]

"Patientiam habe in me": Surface reading Bernard

As I hope has begun to become clear, I see the work of Bernard of Clairvaux as embodying certain key tensions in medieval theology in condensed and influential form. But it is not just that Bernard's work nicely illustrates and encapsulates a set of questions with which later English vernacular writers from Langland to Chaucer to Thomas Malory grapple; nor even just that Bernard's authentic work and the itself often hybrid, authentic-and-inauthentic figure of Bernard are frequently employed as tools with which these and other writers attempt to address

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medieval mystics were to find the center of their piety in contact with Christ in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. . . .The abbot of Clairvaux. . . .so concentrates on the *magnum mysterium*, the sacrament of the marriage of Christ and the church, of which the other sacraments serve as exemplifications . . . that he did not feel compelled to discuss the latter in detail. It is through the foundational *sacramentum*/*mysterium* that we gain access to Christ, who united himself in a personal union without abandoning his substantial union with the Father" (*The Growth of Mysticism* 180). The view of all the sacraments as indicative of a "marriage" pact is one strong manifestation of Bernard's "covenantal" theology.

[27] David Aers attacks the *sine qua non* model in terms of "a 'modern' model of a sacrament as in itself a worthless coin but one that can be exchanged for a large sum of money according to the king's arbitrary will," as opposed to the Thomistic idea that "sacraments both signify and cause the grace that draws people into the life of the Trinity" (*Salvation and Sin* 68). As Green and Courtenay suggest, a covenantal theologian like Bernard means much more than this idea of a pure, proto-capitalist exchange value when he talks about the way the sacraments signify.

[28] Emero Stiegman describes Bernard's "classical augustinian focus on sacramental efficacy through signification," summarized in the Augustinian maxim that "The sacraments effect grace by signifying" ("Sacramenta significando efficiunt gratiam") ("Three Theologians" 102). Jill Mann's "Langland and Allegory" advances a productive reading of Langland along similar linguistic lines.

these questions. It is also the case, as the theologian Andrew Louth has argued, that Bernard stands on the cusp of, and himself arguably inaugurates, a new era in the intellectual life of Europe, and that the seeds he sows in the twelfth century are still being cultivated, hybridized, and re-planted in new soil in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Bernard is therefore himself both on the one hand a somewhat regressive, traditionalist figure—"late summer fruit," Henri de Lubac playfully labels Bernard's richly layered scriptural exegesis as it is modeled in the *Sermons on the Song of Songs* (150)[29]—and on the other a really prophetic one, looking forward to shifts in sentiment that are still being worked out in the Reformation era and beyond. As Louth puts it, "in Bernard we have a shift in the understanding of man, a shift that renders no longer tenable the classical, Platonic-Augustinian synthesis" (8). This shift is most marked by a change in the way we understand the categories of love and knowledge, intellect and affect. For the mainline currents of the tradition that precedes and informs him, "Love and knowledge of God are united in the kind of knowledge we have of God, namely, wisdom, *sapientia*"; for Bernard, on the other hand, "there is a sharp contrast between knowledge and love, for love is not primarily a desire for possession and delight in possessing, as with Augustine, but a feeling" (3). In this "disjunction between thought and feeling," Louth argues, "Bernard is very modern. We are moved by our feelings, not our thoughts: feeling is, in that sense, deeper than thought" (8).[30] This is similar to the point I have tried to make about *Piers Plowman* in Chapter One: a classical

[29] I have followed M.B. Pranger's translation of de Lubac here, as opposed to the more literal "late season fruit" given in the standard translation I have used elsewhere.

[30] A good illustration of this occurs in Bernard's ninth sermon on the *Song of Songs*. Early in the sermon Bernard ventriloquizes the bride of the *Song*, protesting, "There is no question of ingratitude on my part, it is simply that I am in love. The favors I have received are far above what I deserve, but they are less than what I long for. It is desire that drives me on, not reason. Please do not accuse me of presumption if I yield to this impulse of love" ("Non sum ingrata, sed amo. Accepi, fateor, meritis potiora, sed prorsus inferiora votis. Desiderio feror, non ratione. Ne, quaeso, causemini praesumptionem, ubi affectio urget") (9.2; I:43). This speaks to a certain anxiety in Bernard's writing around what is most distinctive in his thought: the prioritization of love seems to be feared as a potential source of "presumption," which Bernard is constantly warning his listeners against.

synthesis, something like what goes under the heading of "virtue ethics" today,[31] is in fact already felt to be broken, or at least in need of real reformulation, in Langland's time. The figure of Bernard is one important means by which Langland attempts to strain both backwards and forwards, beyond it.[32]

Prominent critics of *Piers Plowman* have tended to situate the poem in more rigid, less historically situated theological frameworks. When Morton Bloomfield points out that "redde quod debes" was a phrase that was "frequently used in the definition of justice," he refers to Aquinas's definition—"reddere debitum unicuique" ("render what is due to everyone")—and argues that in it "the Platonic-Aristotelian notion of each receiving his due was assimilated to Christian morality." This is true enough—as is Bloomfield's further claim that, according to this notion, "Christian perfection must in part, if not fundamentally, be social, and hence must involve action. Justice, as summed up in *redde quod debes*, is Christianity in action" (131-2). This much aligns with my above reading of *Piers Plowman*, and in particular with Eleanor Johnson's strong reading of the poem in terms of participatory theology and the priority of social relationships and labor in *Piers*. But it must also be said that *Piers Plowman* strains beyond both what Bloomfield calls the "Platonic-Aristotelian notion" of justice and what Louth refers to as the pre-Bernardine "Platonic-Augustianian synthesis" by which knowledge and love were seen as fundamentally, if not uncomplicatedly, co-inhering. As I argued in Chapter One, with respect to the former framework *Piers* suggests that if charity is really the "form of the virtues," then virtue itself may look very different in the Christian context than it does in the classical. With

[31] I am thinking in particular of David Aers's recent work on Langland, and in general of scholarship informed by the philosophy of Alasdair MacIntyre.

[32] I refer to the way Langland re-poses, in part through some citations of Bernard, the question of what exact kind of knowledge is necessary. Nicholas Watson points out how "only Piers (the poem's figure for experiential understanding, the incarnation, and, I suggest, the vernacular) 'parceyveth' the human heart deeply enough to find charity there, where clerks seek him on the surface. . . .only Piers has the 'kynde knowing' of the humanity he represents and the God he serves to demand God meet humanity's needs" ("Conceptions of the Word" 118).

respect to the latter "synthesis," *Piers Plowman* likewise exists in an unresolved in-between, depicting a "Will" set adrift from its Augustinian enmeshment in the operations of memory and reason, and a mental landscape in which thought and feeling—not to mention a whole host of other allegorized faculties—often appear to be working at cross purposes.[33] It is therefore a poem set importantly after the shift in sentiment that Louth characterizes in terms of a prioritization of love over reason, where to a significant degree "Thought is separated from feeling, theology from spirituality" (9).[34] *Piers*, like Bernard's theology, "draws its power from [its] understanding of man's affective depths: only there is a man deeply engaged" (Louth 8). It also draws from this understanding its deep internal confusion.

This is a different order of analysis from that offered by critics sensitive to the roles of different models of specifically fourteenth-century theology in the poem, such as those engaging with the problems of nominalism, voluntarism, "semi-Pelagianism," and a whole host of questions raised by its engagement with the theological *moderni*. While it is endlessly difficult to situate figures like Langland and even Chaucer, about whose biography we know much more, in terms of such specific, contemporary theological controversies, it seems to me easier—and possibly more rewarding—to take a close look at what they do with the theological voices with

[33] As Gilson points out, the likeness to God that must be restored lies for Bernard "in a good use of free-will, and the restoration effected is therefore essentially the restoration of liberty" (*Mystical Theology* 239); "while Augustine seeks [the image of God] for preference in intellectual cognition . . . , St. Bernard puts it rather in the will, and very especially in freedom" (46). I have not had the space to elaborate on the way Bernard, somewhat like Langland, distinctively locates the image of God in human freedom in particular (*liberum arbitrium*), rather than in (or at least, more frequently than in) the traditional Augustinian triad of memory, reason, and will.

[34] This should probably be connected with Bernard's striking emphasis on "personal experience." Bernard McGinn notes: "Even more important, and indicative of significant innovation in the abbot's thought, is his constant insistence on the necessity of the personal experience of his listeners as the only way to understand his message" (*The Growth of Mysticism* 185). This distinguishes his work from that of his friend William of St. Thierry, who more regularly stresses the necessary interrelatedness of love and knowledge. For William, David N. Bell writes, "It is love which grasps the ungraspable and comprehends the incomprehensible" (*The Image and Likeness* 247); at the same time, "Reason 'forms' the will, directs it, endows it with the knowledge of the good and the desire for it, and reason itself finally 'mounts on high to become love (*amor*)'" (154). This latter citation draws on William's ubiquitous *Golden Letter*, which often circulated under Bernard's name.

which they explicitly engage. This is not necessarily a retreat into a less rigorously historicist retrenchment or Bernardine neo-Robertsonianism.[35] As David Aers cautions, "a historicism driven by a synchronic model of context is never going to be adequate to the study of Christian writing in the Middle Ages. This is because theologians understood St. Augustine or St. Bernard or Peter Lombard or St. Thomas Aquinas as contemporary authorities who belonged to contemporary conversations and disputes" (*Salvation and Sin* 56-7). Paradigmatically, Chaucer's Nun's Priest cites "Augustyn, / Or Boece, or the Bisshop Bradwardyn" in his playful self-recusal from examining the problem of predestination (VII.3241-2). This method might be aligned with what has been called "surface reading," as opposed to more "symptomatic" approaches to literary texts: "When symptomatic readers focus on elements present in the text, they construe them as symbolic of something latent or concealed," looking for absences that "signify the questions that motivate the text, but that the text itself cannot articulate" (Best and Marcus 3); on the other hand, "what lies in plain sight is worthy of attention but often eludes observation—especially by deeply suspicious detectives who look past the surface in order to root out what is underneath it" (18). My reading of the figure of Bernard, and more particularly of Nede's role in *Piers Plowman* and the figure of the Host in *The Canterbury Tales* in the next chapter, seeks to locate features of these texts that they do articulate, but that are too close to the "surface" for much literary criticism to see. As I suggest in my Introduction, I do not propose Bernard of

[35] Steven Justice's article "Who Stole Robertson?" describes the way that, for D.W. Robertson, Jr., "Chaucer's poetry . . . was allegory, whether it looked that way or not; it was indifferent to worldly and humane engagements and pursued the single aim of wrenching human desire from its self-deforming attachments," and documents how this approach dead-ended and was essentially memory-holed in medieval literary criticism (609). Justice argues, however, that "the last generation of medieval literary study could not trenchantly criticize Robertson's intellectual vices . . . because it practiced similar vices in different tones of voice," premised as this more recent criticism was on overlapping forms of historical relativism and materialism (614). This overlaps somewhat with Nicholas Watson's observation that "historicist training" begins with "the separation between desire and reason," which medieval mystics uniformly refuse ("Desire for the Past" 91). Part of what I hope to get from Bernard is a theoretical lens that pushes past this separation.

Clairvaux as a Robertsonian master-key for understanding late medieval literature, but instead as an analogue for formal and conceptual innovations in later literary texts, a particularly common interlocutor whose influence is felt almost everywhere, and a fellow "imaginative theorist" whose style and ideas can help us to read the surfaces of the works we study better.

Langland in effect requires a "surface" reading like this with a pun on Bernardine theology, when dame Studie jokes about the style of debate current among the "lewed" and learned:

> Nowe is the manere at the mete when munstrals ben stille
> The lewed ayen the lered the holy lore to dispute,
> And tellen of the trinite how two slowe the thridde
> And brynge forth ballede resones, taken Bernard to witnesse
> And putten forth presumpcioun to preue the sothe. (C.XI.33-7)

This is not in fact the casual reference it might seem; as I will develop at greater length below, "presumpcioun" is one of the key terms of Bernardine theology, and suggests that Studie specifically means to imply that this style of public argumentation risks a grave sin of which St. Bernard was the great diagnostician. The older tradition, in a sense, "reads" the contemporary situation here, and provides dame Studie with a punning vocabulary adequate to suggesting that the playful conjecture of both learned and lewd might be understood more accurately as a sign of a pervasive, unacknowledged tendency toward presumptuousness. Reading the reference to Bernard on the surface of the disputants' text, Studie is sure that they presume too much.

This brings us back to Bernard with a greater understanding of the role the saint might have to play in his later literary incarnations. His appearance on the surface of these later literary works often signals an attempt to reach back to an older, ostensibly richer tradition to address

some contemporary issue, exposing the theological fault lines these later texts oriented themselves toward. Noticing the internal divisions in *Piers Plowman*–like the one around the role of Conscience in relation to Will's individual conscience—is therefore not just a matter of reading the poem well, or avoiding over-simplifications of its theological agenda. Through noticing its splitness, we can arrive at a greater understanding of the tensions in the cultural and intellectual landscape around it, marking the way the Christian tradition in general is evolving and emending itself in and through literary productions like *Piers* and, as I will argue in Chapters 3 and 4, the more unlikely sites for theological reflection that are *The Canterbury Tales* and the *Morte Darthur*. Close attention to the figure of Bernard, and the broader influence of Bernardine thought and writing in these works, can therefore help us to track the shifts in thinking and art that are taking place between Bernard's twelfth century and Malory's fifteenth, and to see how these well-known literary texts act as both heirs and agents of the change that is effected through Bernardine theology and its many literary descendants. The figure of Bernard can serve as a kind of genetic marker for following this change as it develops out of a dialogue between the saint and the authors who engage with his legacy, as it does here in the case of Langland's interest in covenantal theology and the fraught question of what it means to "return what you owe" to God. As this chapter's epigraph suggests, Bernard's work is not of the kind that tends to provoke tidy resolutions of theological problems; rather, it tends to "stir up a commotion," driving forward the sort of formal and conceptual innovation that is modeled by Langland's *Piers Plowman*, a highly experimental work of theo-poetics that attempts a radical Bernardine "interiorization of the mystery," a "kynde knowyng," of nothing less than God's eternal covenant with the soul.

As Bynum observes, Bernard's many "oppositions and incompatibilities" generate an oddly paradoxical, in some ways even starkly modern, vision of the human being's place in the

cosmic hierarchy (*Metamorphosis* 129): "Thus, as [Bernard's] *De conversione* makes clear, the human being is not really a middle position in the chain of being; rather, it is zenith and abyss. Nor is it primarily a *viator* on the way to God. Forever *dispars*, it is also forever already there" (131).[36] As M.B. Pranger puts it in terms of its consequences for religious experience, "Seen from a retrospective point of view, Bernard can be considered one of the first theologians in western Christendom who has drawn attention to the emotional aspects in the human experience of the divine" ("Bernard the Writer" 239). This is a vision that requires some working out, and that Bernard himself never systematically defined. He is perhaps best understood, as M.B. Pranger has suggested, as "Bernard the writer," not Bernard the theologian; he sets out to capture all the tension and turmoil of existence in the pre-heavenly *saeculum*, and is often more careful to accomplish this feat than to be clear about the precise theological implications of his language.[37] His is a vision that requires, like the servants in the parable, patience to understand: "Patientiam habe in me, et omnia reddam tibi" ("Have patience with me, and I will return everything to you") (Matt. 18.29). This was the lesson that Will learned, in my reading, at the end of *Piers Plowman*: the willingness to dwell in time without reaching beyond the ambiguous horizon of neediness and the chastened pilgrimage of a humbled Conscience. It is also a lesson from which the contemporary reader of Bernard, and of his literary heirs, could benefit. A willingness to stay with the surfaces of the works we study can make our readings more historically informed, not less, because this patience allows the works themselves to more deeply

[36] This might be usefully contrasted with the Cistercian Isaac of Stella's more Neoplatonic view of the "golden chain" of being, which Bernard McGinn discusses at length in his study *The Golden Chain*, and with other more Neoplatonic and Pseudo-Dionysian theologies (61-102). Bernard's vision, although influenced by some of the same sources, is never that neat.

[37] Étienne Gilson's book *The Mystical Theology of Saint Bernard* is well known for bringing Bernard to serious scholarly attention as a theologian in his own right. However, I am not sure the stress on Bernard as theologian, or Denys Turner's more recent stress on Julian of Norwich as theologian, does adequate justice to the way the theologies of both are deeply "artificial," in Pranger's terms; that is, they are theologies of "experience" that deliberately resist being systematized, more like elaborate works of art than scholastic *summae*.

inform our readings of them. It may also make it more likely that we can read and write about them without simply reproducing our own "symptoms."

"I must divide my will": Bernardine crusade theology in the songs of Jaufre Rudel

The "radical doubleness" of Bernardine theology had major consequences for the theological and ecclesiastical landscape of his own day and beyond. As I alluded to above, one persistent difficulty in approaching Bernard is the by no means self-evident relationship between his explicitly theological and exegetical writings, such as the mystical *Sermones super cantica canticorum* ("*Sermons on the Song of Songs*") and the treatise *De diligendo deo* ("*On Loving God*"), and the more ideologically motivated, occasional pieces that emerged out of his work as an active and influential figure in the ecclesiastical and political milieu of his time.[38] Besides having been an important, if at first hesitant, supporter of the foundation of the Knights Templar, and so of the first order of warrior-monks, Bernard was also a close advisor to Pope Eugenius III, the first Cistercian pontiff and a sort of spiritual son of Bernard's, in a crucial period in the history of the relationship between the institutional Christian church and violence. Eventually, on Eugenius's request, Bernard preached the Second Crusade to tremendous effect, becoming so synonymous with the enterprise that the saint's *Vita Prima* goes out of its way to demonstrate that the abbot was in fact "by no means the instigator of the crusade," acknowledging that he "was blamed for the part which he took in preaching the holy war" (116). Bernard himself boasted of France that, as a result of his preaching, "one may scarcely find one man among seven

[38] Emero Stiegman suggests that "To read [Bernard] as theologian, one does well to turn away from the highly-colored surface of twelfth-century confrontations . . . and to seek out, instead, the contemplative who escorted Dante to the throne of the Trinity" ("Bernard of Clairvaux" 131). This dissertation attempts to see both Bernards at once. It is worth noting that some of Bernard's more confrontational writings, particularly his *Apologia* against the over-adornment and laxity of Cluniac monasteries, were unusually popular in England (Holdsworth 171).

women, so many women are there widowed while their husbands are still alive" (Ep. 247.2; 399).

Before examining Bernard's influence in the Middle English vernacular in more detail in Chapter Three, it will be useful first to take a closer look at his "crusading" side of his work, and at the way it complicates the covenantal focus I have described above in relation to *Piers Plowman*. A 2013 article by Lisa Perfetti, "Crusader as Lover: The Eroticized Poetics of Crusading in Medieval France," raises the kinds of questions of theological overlap with literary texts that I deal with throughout this dissertation, in relation to a possibly direct connection between Bernard's crusade preaching and a rich contemporary body of imaginative literary work. Perfetti's article examines the songs of the troubadour and likely crusader Jaufre Rudel,[39] in addition to some other crusade lyrics, in terms of what she calls the "deep-seated appeal of sacrificial desire as a way to demonstrate virtue in courtly culture" (957). She characterizes this appeal as working through a "rhetoric of exchange, in which a gift requires a return gift, which then gets a reward," "typical of much crusade poetry and of crusade preaching as well," which is then often offset by an "appeal to the pains of love" that "interrupts this exchange, returning again to the idea that the poet willingly sacrifices without hope of a reward" (954). Although Perfetti describes "the interpenetration of secular and spiritual language relating to the crusader's willingness to give up his life," and the way the Christian and the courtly work together as "complementary discourses grounding the subject's identity in sacrifice" (947), she offers no thoroughly diagnostic evaluation of the sacrificial theology behind the pervasiveness of this appeal (932). I will attempt to describe these theological underpinnings here, with special

[39] Barbara H. Rosenwein reviews the evidence for Jaufre's participation in the Second Crusade: the two *vidas* that claim he went on crusade to see his far-off lover, and his fellow troubadour Marcabru's reference to Jaufre's having traveled to the Holy Land. She notes that it is still possible he went only as a pilgrim (130).

reference to Bernard's crusade preaching. A close reading of Jaufre's songs in relation to this crusade preaching will make it possible to see how the tension embodied in *Piers Plowman*'s refrain "redde quod debes" also characterizes a fault line in Bernard's thought, which at times in the history of his influence generates a kind of negative image or even polar opposite of the orientation toward God that was so painstakingly cultivated in his more contemplative writings. As we will see, in Jaufre's songs Bernard's repeated exhortations to a kind of balance between the fear and love of God, and the consequent avoidance of presumption and despair, are frequently overpowered by an acute awareness of an emphatically distant love object's absence—resulting, at least potentially, in a deeply felt sense of deprivation that consequently threatens despair. Bernard's call to "return what you owe" in the Holy Land existed side by side with the more covenantal, "pilgrim" focus that I have described above. Putting the unlikely pair of Langland's *Piers Plowman* and Jaufre Rudel's troubadour songs together will help us to see how these "two Bernards" existed in constant tension in the history of his influence, recombining in surprising ways in later literary works.

Although something like Perfetti's "sacrificial desire" plays a role in all of Jaufre's songs, the only song that explicitly references crusade is his "Quan lo rossinhols el folhos" ("When the nightingale in the leafy wood"). As Simon Gaunt points out, the well-known "Lanquan li jorn son lonc en may" ("When the days are long in May") was also likely written at about the time of the Second Crusade in the mid to late 1140s, but neither it nor any of Jaufre's other songs moves beyond the ambiguous "imbrication of love and religion" Gaunt describes as typical of the crusader's work (1). "Quan lo rossinhols el folhos" begins with a delicate celebration of the natural mutuality of love:

Quant lo rosignols el fuoillos

Dona d'amor e·n quier e·n pren

E mou son chant jauzen joios

E remira sa par soven,

E·ill riu son clar e·ill prat son gen,

Pel novel deport que reingna,

Me ven al cor grans jois jacer.

("When the nightingale in the leafy wood / gives of love, asks for it and takes of it / and composes his song rejoicing and joyous / and beholds (reflects) his equal often, / and the streams are clear and the fields are pleasant, / through the new sense of pleasure that reigns, / great joy comes to lie in my heart.") (Pickens 70-1; 1-7)[40]

The simultaneity of giving, asking, and receiving in the second line models an effortless, almost trinitarian circulation of love that is embodied for the speaker, as for Chaucer at the beginning of *The Canterbury Tales*, in the courtship of birds. This love's naturally issuing in song likewise elides the artificiality of songwriting, inviting the speaker and listener into a process of mutual reflection in which the nightingale through its mate, like the listener through the singer, "remira sa par" ("beholds (reflects) his equal"). This "new pleasure" quickly ripens into a settled joy.

This self-contained moment of reflection is quickly disrupted by the second stanza's complaint that, running toward its beloved, the speaker somehow seems to turn backwards—"Quant eu vauc ves leis corren, / Vejaire m'es c'a reüsos / Me·n torn e qu'ella m'an fugen" ("when I go running towards her (it) / it seems to me that backwards / I turn and that she (it) continues fleeing me") (70-1; 9-11)—and the third stanza's concern with the speaker's inability

[40] I have cited Jaufre with reference to Rupert T. Pickens's edition, cited in my Works Cited below. I cite Pickens's edition by page number, followed by line numbers for the corresponding song, both in parentheses, separated by a semicolon.

to articulate its desire, since "non ll'aus merce querrer" ("I dare not beg her for mercy") (70-1; 21). Version One of the song in Rupert Pickens's edition complicates this further with an abrupt about-face, after the fourth stanza's reflections on the "cors tan gen" ("noble (agreeable) body") and "cor plaisen" ("pleasing heart") (72-3; 25-6) of the beloved. The speaker suddenly turns to address its "Amors"—presumably the same one who is spoken of in the third person throughout the rest of the song—and declares:

> Amors, alegre·m part de vos
> Per so car vau mon miellz querren,
> E son d'aitan aventuros
> Qu'enquar n'aurai mon cor jauçen
> La merce de mon bon Guiren
>
> Que·m vol e m'apel' e·m deigna
>
> E m'a tornat en bon esper.
>
> ("Love, eagerly I depart from you / because I go seeking (beseeching) my better, / and I am so fortunate / that soon I shall have my heart enjoying / the mercy of my good Protector, / who desires me and calls me and finds me worthy / and has turned me to good hope.") (72-3; 29-35)

This abrupt ending is perhaps explained, or at least somewhat demystified, by the alternative versions of the song collected in Pickens's edition. The manuscript history of "Quan lo rossinhols" demonstrates the flexibility of Jaufre's "amor du lonh" ("love from afar") tradition, and its potentially sacrificial implications: a sixth stanza of the song, included in Pickens's Versions Two and Three, abruptly shifts the song into an explicitly crusading register. This alternate final stanza explains the parallelism between the nightingale the speaker describes in

the first stanza—who "Dona d'amor e·n quier e·n pren" ("gives of love, asks for it and takes of it") (70-1; 2)—and the love of the fifth stanza's "bon Guiren / Que·m vol e m'apel' e·m deigna" ("good Protector, / who desires me and calls me and finds me worthy") (72-3; 33-4), in terms of a turn away from a vaguely dissatisfied romantic love and toward a more starkly defined call to crusade. This is also therefore a turn from a prospectively mutual love to a love in which the speaker becomes a purely passive figure, "desired and called and valued" rather than giving and asking and receiving.

In executing this about-face, the optional sixth stanza of "Quan lo rossinhols" colors the whole "distant love" tradition of Jaufre Rudel with a question about the crusading implications of what Perfetti describes as the "absolute submission to the Other's desire," constituting the singer's "grounds for existence," and the "focus more often on suffering than on fulfillment" that goes along with it (946). The stanza's turn from addressing an ambiguous "Amors" to something like crusade preaching is executed abruptly, without introduction:

E qi sai reman delechos
E Dieu non sec en Bellïen,
Non sai com sia ja mais pros
Ni com si veinha ha gerimen,
Q'ieu crei e sai mon escïen
    Qe cell cui Jhesu Crist seinha
Segura colpa pot tener.

("And who remains here full of delight / and does not follow God in (into) Bethlehem, / I do not know how he may ever have prowess / or how he may come to good healing, / for

I believe and know by my own knowledge / that he to whom Jesus makes a sign (who takes Jesus Christ as a sign *n*) / can have a sure confession.") (76-7; 36-42)

The majority of manuscripts do not include this final stanza, but it is regarded by Pickens as probably authentic (67). In versions that include it, it is the "good healing" and, in the final line, the "segura colpa" ("sure confession") of Version Two (76-7; 42) or, in Version Three, the "segura escola" ("sure school") of Jesus, that resolves the song's central problematic of the speaker's desire's being defined by distance. Bethlehem offers a "regio"—a "realm," in the sense here of an all too specific place—in which the nagging discomfort of the love object's persisting absence will presumably, at long last, be cancelled. Perfetti's observation that the "putative object of [the singer's] desire must . . . always be kept at a distance . . . for it is desire, not fulfillment, that endows the subject with integrity and wholeness" (942) is circumvented by means of a literalization of the desire that makes attainment possible: the singer will go to Bethlehem, and the act of going will constitute the wholeness he was longing for.

The fate of the final line of Pickens's Version One as it appears in one of the crusading versions of the song provides one final example of just how decisive the presence or absence of crusade ideology in the song can be: the final line "E m'a tornat en bon esper" ("and has turned me to good hope") in the non-crusading Version One (72-3; 35) becomes, in the crusading Version Three of the song, "M'es ops aparcer mon voler" ("I must divide my will (desire)") (80-1; 35). In the latter, crusading version, the "bon Guiren" ("good Healer") is said to introduce a sense of division in the singer's self, rather than a consoling turn to good hope. This offers a kind of reflexive interpretation of the call to crusade, suggesting that this apparent resolution of the speaker's frustrated desire also brings with it a duplicity or even "dualism" in the singer's experience of love. Formerly situated in the relatively straightforward realm of "distant love" and

perpetually unfulfilled desire, the new crusading voice of stanza six introduces, at the end of stanza five in Pickens's Version Three of the song, a painful moment of introspection in which the consequences of going on crusade are weighed, and a poignant expression of what it means to give up on the vision of mutuality that is movingly voiced in the song's first stanza. "Quan lo rossinhols" itself, therefore, "divides its will" across incompatible versions and readings, torn between a longing for mutuality in love and the sacrificial call to Bethlehem. It therefore provides a close vernacular analogue to what Bynum calls the "radical doubleness" of St. Bernard's at once both mystical and violent, "pilgrim" and "crusading" theology.

"How has the gold been darkened": Bernardine simplicity and crusading duplicity

In the exploration of the image of God near the end of his *Sermones super cantica canticorum*, Bernard attributes three fundamental qualities to the soul in its native state, each of which is seen as uniquely emblematic of the soul's dignity as made in that image: freedom of will, immortality, and simplicity. Of these, simplicity is described first and at greatest length (81.2; II:284-5). In fallen mankind, the native simplicity of the soul is compromised by the duplicity of sin. In the *Sermones* Bernard suggests that sin must always involve a disavowal of the soul's complete dependence on God—the mark of its natural and simple state—and the assertion of a putatively autonomous self-will over and against the will of God. This disavowal in turn results in a self-imposed fragmentation of the self, a state of duplicity that arrives not because of some threateningly arbitrary divine punishment, but rather because the soul's natural, God-given simplicity cannot co-inhere with its asserted autonomy; it cannot serve two masters, so to speak. The resulting state of sinful duplicity is what Bernard calls, in a phrase taken from

Augustine's *Confessions*, the "regio dissimilitudinis" ("realm of unlikeness:).[41] To paraphrase, in this state the sinful soul becomes "unlike" itself because it has become unlike that dependent simplicity that God made it to be. The soul in this state can even sometimes sense its alienation from the native simplicity and simple dependence of the whole created order; it has become fundamentally dislocated with respect to itself, and to reality.

Surprisingly, Bernard takes this state of duplicity to be, in a sense, grounds for hope. The deeper Bernard's description of "duplicity" goes, the darker the soul's situation seems, the more emphatic is Bernard's insistence that a state of complete simplicity is in fact native to the soul, whereas its state of fallen duplicity is merely secondary and acquired. This is what Bynum has described, in not wholly flattering terms, as the way in which, for Bernard, "nothing can ever really be added, at least not intrinsically," to the soul; "Bernard often speaks as if roles and sins, despair and death, are only overclothing" (*Metamorphosis* 131). The very intensity with which the soul senses its dislocation testifies, in Bernard's view, to the reality of the soul's real location, its rightful "home" in its simple dependence on its creator. Bernard succinctly summarizes this point in his eighty-second sermon on the Song of Songs, which presents his last and most mature reflection on the image of God's abiding presence in the soul:[42] "nonetheless, there perseveres in every soul, along with its original duplicity, a native simplicity" ("perseverat nihilominus in omni anima cum originali duplicitate generalis simplicitas") (82.3; II:294). An earlier passage treats the same theme in greater detail: "Scripture says 'made of unlikeness,' not

[41] This summary of Bernardine thinking on the subject of simplicity is especially indebted to Gilson's *The Mystical Theology of Saint Bernard*, and to Thomas Merton's essay "St. Bernard on Interior Simplicity." For Augustine's *regio*, see his *Confessions* VII, 10.16.

[42] Bernard McGinn points out that Bernard presents two substantially different models of the image and likeness of god in the soul: "The abbot of Clairvaux's most extended reflections on anthropology occur in the *Grace and Free Choice* and at the end of the *Sermons on the Songs of Songs*. . . .There are significant differences between the two treatments. (Bernard admitted this in confessing in the latter text that what he had to say here was *diversa . . . sed, ut arbitror, non adversa* from the former, that is 'different, but not opposed, I think.')" (*The Growth of Mysticism* 168).

because the likeness is destroyed, but because another has been superadded. . . .'Their foolish heart has been darkened,' says the Apostle; and the Prophet: 'How has the gold been darkened, and the best color changed?' He laments that the gold has been darkened, but it is gold nonetheless" ("quod Scriptura loquitur de dissimilitudine facta, non quia similitudo ista deleta sit loquitur, sed quia alia superducta. . . .Denique Obscuratum est insipiens cor illorum, Apostolus ait; et Propheta: Quomodo obscuratum est aurum, mutatus est color optimus? Obscuratum aurum plangit, sed aurum tamen") (82.2; II:293). Moreover, Bernard identifies that ineradicable, "native" likeness with the inherence of Christ as the Word in the soul as the very condition of its existence, offering His "kinship" to the both passive and active human subject as a kind of "turning," a certain grain that every soul, no matter how "darkened," remains free to follow. Concluding the same sermon, Bernard insists that the soul "does not lack grounds for hope: its turning is to the Word. The dignified kinship of the soul with the Word is not in vain . . . and its persisting likeness [is] a witness of that kinship" ("Nec deest occasio praesumendi: ad Verbum est conversio eius. Non est apud Verbum otiosa animae generosa cognatio . . . et cognationis testis similitudo perseverans") (82.7; II:297). The perception of duplicity is, for the Bernard of these *Sermones*, a first necessary step in recognizing and recovering the soul's simplicity, a way of working backwards toward the "gold," the best and original color beneath all the darkening; but it is equally, if not more, important to always keep one eye on the soul's inherent dignity as represented by that gold. An incipiently dualistic over-emphasis on the "original" sin or dissimilitude in the soul is, for Bernard, at least implicitly diagnosed as a symptom of sin and the way it sees the world; the soul's deepest reality consists in a participatory likeness that cleaves between and comprehends both an intensely felt sense of the soul's tendency toward duplicity,

which guards against presumption, and a just as deeply felt sense of the soul's inherent worth, which guards against despair.

It is in maintaining this tension that Jaufre's songs, perhaps under Bernard's more crusading influence, tend to waver. Marisa Galvez has written recently of the way crusade lyric must negotiate "the physical and psychological distance between here and there, Christian and profane values, social affirmation as a 'chevalreus' crusader and longed-for union with an idealized object of desire" (184-5). Proposed as a kind of penitential pilgrimage, crusade seems to have been imagined by Bernard as an emergency route back to the soul's innate simplicity.[43] If "Quan lo rossinhols" is any indication, it may in fact have been experienced, at least by some crusading knights, as a painful sundering of the self. However, Jaufre's peculiarly "distant" love is still more distinctively divided against itself than this: unlike the specifically crusading objects of Galvez's study, and unlike Bernard's emphatically un-romantic interpretations of the *Song of Songs*,[44] Jaufre's songs specifically encourage a blurring of the border between romantic love and the love for God as it was expressed in crusading contexts.[45] In this way, in Bernardine terms, the potential for destructive duplicity here becomes still more severe, because it threatens to involve one's most fundamental perceptions of the soul in relation to God. The potential problem lies not merely, or even primarily, in the blurring of sacred and secular loves. It lies more fundamentally in the way Jaufre's songs, if they are taken as having to do with God, would

[43] As Richard Kaeuper points out, "Sermons generally offered crusaders just what they surely needed to hear and wanted to possess: unambiguous assurance of sins forgiven in this world and a safe passage through devilish perils to glory in the next" (69).
[44] As Stiegman puts it, "Bernard could see no intrinsic worth in the fleeting things of the temporal order. A further problem posed by the body was its sexuality. . . .At several points in interpreting the Song of Songs (his canticum spirituale), he dismissed the idea that its imagery involved sexual feeling, 'something corporeal.' With this, he perpetuated a difficulty in perceiving, specifically in the spousal intimacy of sex, a supernal sign value in marriage" ("Bernard of Clairvaux" 136).
[45] Simon Gaunt writes of "Lanquan li jorn": "critics have wondered whether Jaufre was alluding to a woman (and if so whether she is real or fictional), or whether the *amor de lonh* represents social distance, the Virgin Mary, God, or indeed the Holy Land? The poem is famously susceptible to different readings" (1).

seem to characterize the human experience of the divine as one of near-despairing distance and frustrated longing—and therefore threaten to dramatically "obscure" the "gold" that represents, in the Bernardine schema, the soul's most intimate possession, the image of God in the soul.

Margaret Switten has written convincingly of the mixture of divine and human love in "Lanquan li jorn," arguing that "departure for the crusade could bring to the poetic theme of absence a powerful spatio-temporal context. Crusading knight and poetic lover desire and long for a distant goal: the lady, Jerusalem, paradise, finally" (67-8). Switten parallels Bernard's and Jaufre's making the love-object the "object of salvation," but makes a qualification that I would complicate and push further: "for Bernard, the desire for God is finally fulfilling because God has loved us first, and our desire for him through his love for us can become an attainment of bliss. The vernacular poet is more somber" (74). This echoes critical judgments going as far back as Étienne Gilson's attempt to disentangle courtly love from Bernard's teachings: Gilson claimed that what the sacrificial or "disinterested" quality in troubadour song had to be understood as little more than an attempted trick of seduction, pretending disinterestedness until the desired "reward" was achieved or "hope vanishes for good and all" (180). Gilson also claimed that the "suffering" characteristic of unrequited love in courtly lyric was "precisely the suffering that Bernard would avoid, and from which he would help us free ourselves"[46] He asks, "Is an unrequited love even conceivable? St. Bernard and all the Christian mystics answer, no. Love belongs to the order of friendship, and friendship essentially implies mutual good will. . . .What the courtly poets call by this name is merely desire in the eyes of the Christian mystics" (181). This is a hard teaching. In my view, and as Perfetti suggests, the specific case of crusade songs that operate under the sway of Bernard's own preaching, or at the very least against the

[46] According to Gilson, "Men suffer because they love and are not loved in return; love therefore God and you will never know what it is to feel an unrequited love: for—let us never forget it—God has loved us first" (181).

theological background that Bernard came to dominate, cannot be so easily contrasted with Bernardine theology in general. It is undoubtedly the case that for Bernard, God loves us first. But a closer examination of Jaufre's best-known song, and the saint's crusade writing in relation to it, will show that for Bernard, as for Jaufre Rudel, things were not always so simple.

"When the days are long in May": Crusade preaching and distant love

While it is almost certainly the case that Jaufre Rudel went on the Second Crusade, and it is certainly true that Bernard of Clairvaux vigorously preached and promoted it, Bernard and Jaufre may be yoked together even more closely and confidently than this. In a discussion of Jaufre's song "Qan lo rius de la fontana," Roy Rosenstein argues persuasively that the Hugh VII, Count of La Marche, with whom he identifies the "Hugon Brun" of that song's tornada, was close family friends with Jaufre. He goes on to suggest that, because Hugh is known to have heard Bernard preach the Second Crusade to an infamously large and enthusiastic crowd at Vézelay on March 31, 1146, it is very likely that Jaufre himself heard that famous kick-off to the crusade preached in person (231). In any case, it is safe to assume that at least the gist and spirit of Bernard's preaching would have reached Jaufre, due not only to Hugh's presence there but also to the presence of several other of Jaufre's other family friends, including some others to whom he refers specifically by name in other songs (232). There is every indication that this preaching was a remarkable, epochal event—a sort of medieval tent revival, which involved Bernard's preaching on a raised platform in a field because the town's basilica court was too small to accommodate the crowd (Phillips 68). The twelfth century monk and historian Odo of Deuil agrees with Bernard's *Vita Prima* in asserting that Bernard's address was so successful that the saint ran out of the crusading crosses he had prepared to distribute, and was consequently

"forced to tear his own garments into crosses and to sow them abroad" (9). The exact contents of this galvanizing sermon are lost, though several of Bernard's crusade-related letters, some of which possibly even repeat sections of the original sermon's contents, do survive. One widely distributed encyclical, in which Bernard declares prospective crusaders "blessed to be alive in this year of jubilee, this year of God's choice" (Ep. 363.3; 462), likely conveys some of the enthusiasm of the crusade preaching to which Jaufre must have been privy, whether in person or by proxy.

The paradigmatic song of what is now known as the "amor du lonh" ("distant love") tradition, and of which Jaufre's work is the great exemplar, is saturated with just enough crusade language to make it possible to understand the whole song, and even the kind of love it is famous for celebrating, in terms of this crusading context. The song's first indirect reference to crusade comes in its second stanza: "Tant es sos pretz verais e fis / Qe lai el renc dels Sarrazis / Fos eu per lieis chaitius clamatz" ("So much is her (its) worth true and fine / that there in the kingdom of the Saracens / would I be called, for her sake, captive") (164-5; 12-4).[47] The "renc dels Sarrazis" is the first noun specifically used to describe the "amor de loing" of which the faraway birdsong at the song's beginning reminds the speaker:

> Lan qand li jorn son lonc e mai
> M'es bels douz chans d'auzels de loing;
> E qand me sui partitz de lai
> Remembra·m d'un' amor de loing
> ("When the days are long in May / I like a sweet song of birds from afar, / and when I have gone away from there / I am reminded of a love from afar.") (164-5; 1-4)

[47] I am using Pickens's "Version 1" of "Lanquan li jorn" (164-9).

The second possible crusading reference occurs in stanza five, and significantly complicates the picture: “Ai! car me fos lai peleris / Si qe mos fustz e mos tapis / Fos pelz sieus bels huoills remiratz!” (“Ah! would that I were a pilgrim there / so that my staff and my cloak / might be reflected in (beheld by) her beautiful eyes!”) (166-7; 33-5). The “bels huoills” are the song’s only description, physical or otherwise, of the speaker’s love object, inviting a romantic reading of the song; and yet, this isolated and formulaic description is preceded by a very pointed reference to pilgrimage, which in turn invites a reading of the poem as an allegory for the love of God as expressed in pilgrimage or on crusade, specifically centered in the “realm of the Saracens.” A more or less straightforwardly romantic construal of the song is more than possible, but then so is a spiritual, or even a crusading, one. Whatever his intentions, Jaufre undeniably bends the romance toward the realm of crusade.

This confusion of human, divine/pilgrim, and/or divine/crusading love objects is reinforced by the song’s extended play on “lai,” the Provençal word for “there.” The word occurs first in line three, “qand me sui partitz de lai” (“when I have gone away from there”), where it indicates the speaker’s withdrawal from the place where he first heard the birdsong in the song’s first stanza. The motif of something absent and longed-for is introduced into the song even earlier, by way of the speaker’s recounting that this birdsong was first heard “de loing” (“from afar”): the speaker listens to the song over there, then moves away from where he was at first, making the “here” of the first two lines immediately into another “there,” effecting a double remove at the poem’s beginning. It is only when the listener arrives at “car me fos lai peleris” in stanza five that the “there” of stanza two makes possible a more specific orientation: “lai el renc dels Sarrazis,” introducing the realm of crusade as the first definitive location toward which the song orients itself. The same tension between song of romance and song of pilgrimage and/or

crusade can be seen in play in the song's many ambiguous pronouns, which regularly defy the translator to choose between "it" and "her" or "its" and "hers." The "worth true and fine" for which the speaker would be declared captive, for instance, might be translated as "her" worth or "its" worth, and similar cases make it possible to understand the love object as a "her" or an "it" in most instances. Variations among manuscripts show that the same ambiguity was enacted across different versions of the song as recorded and likely as performed; for example, manuscript C and Version Three in Pickens's edition has "Mas tot sia cum a lieys platz!" ("but all be as it pleases her!") (176-7; 28), whereas the more frequently attested version I have used retains some variation of "Mas tot sia cum a Dieu platz!" (but all be as it pleases God!") (166-7; 21). This confusion between God and an ambiguous "she" is a natural outgrowth of the thematics of the song itself, insofar as it consistently effects a confusion between the romantic and the spiritual planes. It is also part and parcel of the whole totalizing drive of Jaufre's "distant love," which characteristically converts every possibility of presence into a register of rigorously enforced distance.

Although it is not voiced as clearly in the song, something of the expression "M'es ops aparcer mon voler" ("I must divide my will") hangs over "Lanquan li jorn" as well. The singer's preference for frozen winter, his description of himself as "de talan enbroncs e clis" ("bent and bowed with desire") (164-5; 5), his exclamation that "per un ben qe me n'eschai / N'ai dos mals, car tant m'es de loing" ("for one good thing which befalls me from it, / I have two griefs because she (it) is so far away from me") (166-7; 31-2), all convey a sense of the self as split by the desire described. As I have suggested above, Bernard's own writing at times betrays similar tendencies. The emphatic "there"s and "distant shore" of a letter written by Bernard on the subject of the Second Crusade to his Uncle Andrew, himself a Knight of the Temple, resonate

deeply with Jaufre's "amor de loing," and suggest potentially substantial overlap between the crusading mindsets of the saint and the troubadour:

> What profit has man for all his labour under the sun? Let us rise above the sun and let our conversation be in heaven, going ahead with the mind to where we shall soon follow with the body. There, my dear Andrew, there you will receive the fruit of your labours, there you will have your reward. Under the sun you fight as a soldier, but for the sake of him who is above the sun. Let us who fight upon earth look to him for largesse. Our reward for fighting comes not from the earth, not from below, but is "a rare treasure from distant shores." (Ep. 288.1; 479)

Bernard's "rare treasure from distant shores" constitutes a reference to the "procul et de ultimus finibus pretium eius" of Proverbs 31.10. In its original context, the phrase occurs in response to the question, "Mulierem fortem quis inveniet?" ("Who will find a virtuous wife?"). This gives a good sense of what a tangled web is woven in Bernard's letter to his uncle: in the context of crusade, the saint references offhand a section of Proverbs describing the ideal wife in great detail; the "reward" of crusading, then, is understood as analogous to the aim of searching for a perhaps literal, perhaps allegorical wife. In what could be understood as a rigorous if symptomatically over-literal application of Bernard's own frequent recommendations to prioritize the spiritual sense over its figures in the temporal realm,[48] romantic love becomes here implicitly a figure for a specifically crusading love for God and for the Holy Land as in need of military re-conquest.

[48] Bernard's *De laude novae militiae* ("*In Praise of the New Knighthood*"), written in support of the Knights Templar, is particularly insistent on this point. The treatise's long second half describes the spiritual significance of several sites in the Holy Land, and specifically argues that the Temple where the knights are stationed must be understood in terms of the spiritual virtues it houses now, as opposed to its perishable ornaments and colors (V.1).

Likewise, in Jaufre's "Lanquan li jorn," it is the "pretz" ("worth") of the speaker's beloved for which the speaker declares he would be taken captive "el renc dels Sarrazis" ("in the realm of the Saracens") (164-5; 12-3). As with "la cambra e·l jardis" ("the chamber and the garden")—two locations with particular significance for the *Song of Songs*[49]—that the speaker says "Mi resembles totz temps palatz" ("will resemble to me forever a palace"), if only he can see his "amor de loing" again (166-7; 41-2), Jaufre's "pretz" does not necessarily require a scriptural context, but nonetheless carries rich scriptural connotations. This final statement of what will happen to the speaker if he sees his beloved again could be taken to suggest the bliss that can occur anywhere where the beloved is; it might just as well be taken to mean something like the Psalmist's one request of the Lord, "that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to see the pleasure of the Lord and to visit his temple" (Psalm 26.4). Though perhaps moving in different directions, Bernard and Jaufre alike, making use of the same scriptural language of pretium/pretz, so confound the romantic and the spiritual planes that it becomes more or less impossible to isolate either, or to understand one without reference to the other. In the above letter in particular, Bernard himself, in language that is very reminiscent of Jaufre's, can be seen to construe the love of God as the love of something that must be sought, for the crusader if not for Bernard and his monks, always over "there," at a distance, in the manner of one seeking "a rare treasure from distant shores."[50] Instead of being drawn ecstatically

[49] See the Song of Songs 1.3 for the chamber, and 4.15-6 (and elsewhere) for the garden.

[50] Pranger points out how this crusading structure of desire does not apply to the Cistercian monks themselves, for whom Jerusalem remains conveniently accessible at home: "Both coming together in the notion of Jerusalem, Bernard's attitude toward the failure of the second crusade will turn out to depend on his ultimate reduction of the historic Holy Place in Palestine to the Jerusalem of Clairvaux" (*Bernard of Clairvaux* 27). Writing about a monk who stopped at Clairvaux on his way to crusade and never left, Bernard once specifically described Clairvaux as a "short cut" to Jerusalem. Pranger describes the way this kind of thinking informed Bernard's later explanation of the Crusade's failure: "That short cut which conditions . . . God's battle orders as well as the rhythm of life in the Jerusalem of Clairvaux, leaves the broken dreams of the crusaders intact, indeed, cruelly so, while absorbing them in a ritual of superior failure and consolation" (44). In annexing the idea of Jerusalem to the monastic context, "a complete reversal of temporal and spiritual order takes place. The monastic re-creation claims a priority of the

outside of himself, into the kind of mutual giving and taking that is modeled at the outset of Jaufre's song "Quan lo rossinhols," Bernard's imagined knight-lover is captivated by a certain transferable, abstractable "worth," which renders him open to the obscuring of boundaries between the love for God and its application in terms of the "value" of a Holy Land reconceived as the crusaded-after beloved. For Bernard and for Jaufre, loving release is alternately longed-for and, at times as in Bernard's letter, in danger of becoming something infinitely deferred, annexed to a purely spiritual realm that is never quite allowed to incarnate itself within the realities of one's daily life.

A closer look at one more key work of Bernardine theology will, I hope, serve to better define the nature and effects of this simultaneous deferral and literalization. As I alluded to above, in his *De diligendo deo* ("*On Loving God*") treatise Bernard writes at length on the balance between presumption and despair, depicting the spiritual life as one of constantly calling to mind one's distance from the divine ideal without losing one's sense of the soul's inherent dignity as created by God, and so of its abiding kinship with and proximity to the divine. "It is necessary that you know two things," Bernard says: "both what you are, and that you are not so by your own power, so that you do not either not glory at all, or vainly glory" ("Utrumque ergo scias necesse est, et quid sis, et quod a teipso non sis, ne aut omnino videlicet non glorieris, aut inaniter glorieris") (II.4; III:122). To over-value the self is to presume, to treat one's gifts as though there had been no giver; to feel shame for what you are is to despair, a kind of reverse-presumption in its presuming to fathom the soul with no feeling for its being created by, and so infinitely valued by, God. This schema found its natural home within a chivalric culture that

spiritual over the literal, of imagination over facts, of the artificial over the natural without excluding the one from the other" (48). Langland's Clergie puts this idea more succinctly, in a passage excised from the C-Text: "if hevene be on this erthe, and ese to any soule, / It is in cloister or in scole" (B.X.297-8).

placed emphasis on "praise" and "blame," "honor" and "shame," and Bernard in fact appealed freely to these categories in his crusade writing. In the widely disseminated crusade encyclical referenced above, he warns readers that if the "vessels of wrath"—the Muslims who had taken Edessa, believed to have been the first city to have adopted Christianity—"but once lay hands upon these holy places there shall be no sign or trace of piety left. Such a catastrophe would be a source of appalling grief for all time, but it would also be a source of confusion and endless shame for our generation" (Ep. 363.3; 461). The *De diligendo*'s warning against despair is, it seems, here lost in the shuffle of the occasion's demanding a shame-based call to arms; Bernard cannot read the re-conquest of the literal Jerusalem as anything but a real threat to the eschatological Jerusalem.

Of course, this blurring of the lines between spiritual and more worldly, chivalric values and categories of thought was by no means unique to Bernard.[51] Michael Routledge has drawn attention to the way crusade ideology provided a "perfect structure" for the categories of praise and blame—praise for going on crusade, blame for staying home—and pointed out that crusade songwriters in fact often made explicit use of these categories (97). Though Jaufre's stubbornly mysterious love songs are rarely so explicit about anything, the category of "shame" does resonate strongly with the final exhortatory stanza of the first song discussed in this chapter, "Quan lo rossinhols el folhos." As we saw above, the final, often omitted, stanza of the song completely disrupts the romantic push-and-pull of the song's first five stanzas, declaring, "E qi sai reman delechos / E Dieu non sec en Bellïen, / Non sai com sia ja mais pros / Ni com si veinha

[51] It is important to note, hoewver—as I do in Chapter One—that Bernard's enthusiastic support for the Second Crusade was not a default position. Jean Leclercq's essay "Saint Bernard's Attitude toward War" clarifies that other clerics, including fellow Cistercian Isaac of Stella, opposed the foundation of the Templars and the crusade itself (28-9). As Leclercq remarks, it was only with Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century that a really authoritative extension of Augustine's provisional "just war" theory was attempted (6).

ha gerimen" ("And who remains here full of delight / and does not follow God in (into) Bethlehem, / I do not know how he may ever have prowess / or how he may come (*n*) to good healing") (76-7; 36-9). This at least verges on Bernard's rhetoric of shame, and seems to anticipate Marcabru's infamous "lavador," which represents the Holy Land of crusade as a place of surefire soul-cleansing in his popular song "Pax in nomine domini." The final line of the song's sixth stanza in particular recalls the Second Crusade's peculiar advance on the first: its promise not just of the remission of penance ("pena") but of the remission, to the confessed crusader, of the "culpa" ("guilt") of sin itself (Phillips 55). This in turn speaks to a peculiarity of Bernard's theological career: despite his emphasis on the importance of contrition in making a good confession,[52] Bernard was, against Abelard, a proponent of the priest's power not merely to offer absolution to the sinner but in some sense "actually themselves to remit the divine punishment" (Constable, "The Second Crusade" 250-1). Hence, perhaps, Bernard's capacity to preach with such apparent conviction Eugenius III's papal bull, *Quantum praedecessores*, which concludes with the declaration that "whosoever devoutly begins and completes so holy a journey or dies on it will obtain absolution from all his sins of which he has made confession with a contrite and humble heart" (282). Bernard's crusade preaching, then, might be said to have offered the would-be crusader, among other things, a hitherto unprecedented means of dealing with any lingering despair over his own sinfulness. Crusade itself would heal the crusader's soul, finally providing Jaufre and his fellow knights with their longed-for "guerimen" ("reward/healing") of forgiven, blameless simplicity.

As we saw above, the presence or absence of the crusading, shaming sixth stanza transforms "Quan lo rossinhols" completely, determining whether it is explicitly a crusade song

[52] As we will see in Chapter Three, Bernard is cited to this effect in the first part of Chaucer's *Parson's Tale*.

or not. The very fact that the song can and did survive entirely without the final crusade stanza, moreover, testifies to what I have described in terms of the protean, catch-all malleability, and totalizing drift, of Jaufre's "distant love." Pickens's Version One, well represented in the manuscript tradition, lacks the sixth stanza, and so appears to conceive of romantic love itself as characterized by furious and frustrated longing. Without this crusading sixth stanza, "Quan lo rossinhols" becomes still more similar to "Lanquan li jorn": suggestions of a spiritualized love, if taken seriously, may determine the whole experience of the song; then again, it is easy to gloss over them and to experience the "distant love" as a purely romantic one—and so to experience the "bon esper" with which Version One ends as, instead, the good hope of attaining the love object, by turns lamented and celebrated, of stanzas two through four (72; 35). The ease with which the love described in "Quan lo rossinhols" may be understood as romantic, or spiritual in the more "pilgrim" fashion, or specifically and forcefully "crusading," demonstrates that a song does not have to be a crusade song, or even to make any identifiable reference to crusading at all, to be substantially determined, or at least deeply troubled, by a crusading mindset. The "romantic" version of the song, without the crusading stanza, is involved in the same difficulties of conceiving of all love objects as distant, and of negotiating a sense of fundamental division in the self and the self's will; the whole tenor of desire itself in Jaufre's songs, whether romantic or spiritual or both, depends consistently on a sense of the love object as always over "there," insistently deferred, a "rare treasure from distant shores." Consequently, for these songs, the ideal love object comes at times to seem simply the one that makes the most demands on us, the one that moves us furthest from ourselves, the most "distant" one possible.

The crusading versions of "Quan lo rossinhols," with their abrupt shifts from a vague romantic love object to a specific crusading agenda and even to a particular city or destination of

desire, “Bethlehem,” pose for the modern reader or listener of the song some of the same questions Jaufre Rudel’s songs may have posed to his contemporary listeners: is the final stanza of “Quan lo rossinhols,” or, for that matter, the reference to captivity at the hands of the Saracens in “Lanquan li jorn,” the interpretive key to the song, or a merely epiphenomenal flourish? Or, to bring the question closer to the subject of this chapter: is either of the two “distant love” songs I have discussed here a specifically “crusade song,” or are they both perhaps “crusading” songs in a sense much more all-encompassing than that? If Jaufre depicts the dialectic of frustrated desire, the back-and-forth of presence and absence, experience and memory, he may do so—as I have argued about Bernard above—deliberately, in order to capture the “radical doubleness” of existence that Bynum criticized as a lack of historicity in St. Bernard. It is at least possible that Jaufre may be best understood as depicting, as one critic puts it, “*lai* (there)” as a “source of memory, which in this case is a source of poetry,” attempting to capture the “eschatological tension” that generates it (Spillenger 22). But “lai” is also explicitly for Jaufre the realm of crusade, “lai el renc dels Sarrazis”; and so his songs, like Bernard’s crusade sermons, also model the way desire at a distance can become destructive, even violent, when it is not balanced by a “pilgrim” sense of the desired object’s essential un-possessability.

If this chapter must leave open many important questions about Jaufre and his songs, it may at least suggest one or two things more about Bernard of Clairvaux and the specific character of his theological imagination. Jaufre’s insertion into his song “Quan lo rossinhols,” almost without warning, of this specific location, this Bethlehem where one may attain a good school or good confession, is reminiscent of nothing else in Jaufre’s limited, and more or less specificity-resistant, corpus. It is, however, entirely typical of Bernard, whose imagination was distinctly topographical long before it was turned to preaching the Crusade—in his celebrated

recourse to the Augustinian idea that the state of sinfulness may become a kind of place, a "regio," and in his earlier treatise *De laude novae militiae* ("*In Praise of the New Knighthood*"), where he describes with relish, and with many allegorical flourishes, the specific locales of the Holy Land that constituted the sworn "realm" of the Knights Templar. In that treatise Bernard spends, in fact, a whole chapter on the city of Bethlehem where, as he puts it, man's dignity was restored, so that the Christian "who has found life in the words of Christ no longer seeks the flesh" ("qui in verbis Christi vitam invenit, carnem iam non requirit") (VI.12; III:225). Much later, writing to the Cluniac abbot Peter the Venerable in the wake of the Second Crusade's failure, Bernard complained that "the Lord of heaven is losing his land, the land where his feet have stood." "What does this mean," he asked, "but that the very grounds of our salvation, the riches of the Christian people are being taken away?" (Ep. 521.1; 473). Following Bernard's own allegorical principles as they were set out in the *De laude* treatise and elsewhere, I would suggest that a realm of the "flesh" that is merely spiritualized, rather than anagogically re-infused with and re-interpreted in terms of the spirit and so of its eternal significance, will inevitably and dramatically return as over-spiritualized flesh and over-literal spatializations of time and time-deprived place. This is why the twentieth-century theologians Yves Congar and Henri de Lubac were right, I think, to stress the importance of the anagogical sense and of its diminishment in the interpretive frameworks of the later Middle Ages: the confusion of the literal Jerusalem with the "very grounds of our salvation" is, at least in part, an exegetical failure, and a confusion about the way eternal significance relates to its temporal signs.[53]

[53] Following Congar, de Lubac sees a "lack of the eschatalogical sense" as "the most crucial defect arising from scholasticism," emerging "precisely from the fact that theology then no longer has the form of an exegesis" (195). Bernard's exegetical preaching compensates for this emergent lack, even as his crusade preaching dramatically enacts it.

It may appear incredible, with the benefit of a near millennium of hindsight, that Bernard should ever have discussed Christendom's losing Jerusalem as if it were a significant "loss" to the Godhead itself, or as if it jeopardized "the very grounds of our salvation." Phrases such as Bernard's declaration, in the widely circulated encyclical to which I have referred earlier in this chapter, that the crusade was "a cause in which to conquer is glorious and for which to die is gain" (Ep. 363.4; 462)—an adaptation of St. Paul's statement that for him "to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1.21)—may sound remarkably tin-eared to most modern readers, and especially shocking because they proceed from the pen of the famously "mellifluous doctor." Scholars of Bernard often describe the saint as, in this respect, "a true child of his time" (Kahl 38); John Gordon Rowe writes of the Second Crusade's failure, "Having in great degree a holy simplicity of his own, [Bernard] often achieved simplicity in his exhortations, particularly when he was not fully aware of the complexity of certain events" (87). But, if what I have argued about the crusading mentality in the songs of Jaufre Rudel holds true, it should be considered not only that Bernard may have been a gravely mistaken evaluator of the Second Crusade's likely success, not to mention the souls of a crusading force that Bernard clearly imagined as an army of pious penitents, but that the tenor of his crusade preaching may have affected the whole character of the desire of those under its influence—their souls, so to speak.

In this section of Chapter Two I have suggested that Bernard's preaching of the Second Crusade may have been a matter not merely of encouraging a certain number of men to kill and to die on crusade, but also of radically impacting the whole psyches of those many men who took up the cross[54]—their conception of themselves with relation to God, and of what those selves'

[54] Perfetti notes that "Crusade sermons designated the crusader in several ways: as pilgrim (*peregrinus*), he who has taken the cross (*crucesignatus*), and as soldier, vassal, or servant in the service of Christ or God" (936). The notion of being "signed by the cross" has interesting resonances with Bernard's peculiarly sign-based sacramental theology.

rightly ordered love of God was meant to feel like. It is probably beyond the reach of scholarly writing to suggest that there was something symbolic about that rending of the monk's robe to make crosses for the crusaders at Vézelay, but it may not be beyond the student of Bernard to suggest that there is a certain split, a kind of tear, between the Bernard who put as eloquently as anyone before or after the idea of God's love for each soul as that soul's most intimate, inalienable attribute, and the Bernard who so aggressively preached the "jubilee" of full remission as available only to those willing to fight and die on crusade. The sense of a "split will" that is indelibly described by Jaufre, at least, suggests a psychic state of crusading love that is very far from the settled simplicity Bernard describes, both in brief in his *De laude novae militiae* treatise and at greater length in his *Sermones super cantica canticorum*, as the ideal state of every soul. And it is probably not beyond the student of Jaufre Rudel to suggest that this idea of the love object as always over "there," located in an ever-receding elsewhere, if taken to be a description of a love that is meant to be importantly analogous to one's experience of loving God, locates the lover in a strange spiritual space, a different kind of "regio dissimilitudinis"—under the curse, in a phrase from the conclusion of Jaufre's "Lanquan li jorn," "Qu'ieu ames e no fos amatz" ("that I should love and not be loved") (176-7; 49).[55]

Bernard and the Pseudo-Bernard in England

For some in the twelfth century, the church's command "redde quod debes" ("return what you owe") was heard as a call to crusade. For many others then and after, what that demand meant was defined by a theology that was, in its own way, as shaped by Bernard's voice as was

[55] It is worth noting here that Jaufre's "Lanquan li jorn" is thought to have served as a melodic model for Walther von der Vogelweide's "Palastinalied," a song of the Fifth Crusade that celebrates the "just claim" of the Christians to the Holy Land over the claims of the Muslims and Jews (Husmann 17-8).

the Second Crusade's preaching. The influence of Bernard's *Sermones super cantica canticorum* is diffuse and difficult to trace in the vernacular;[56] Bernard's *De diligendo deo* ("*On Loving God*") treatise was also popular in England from the middle of the thirteenth century on, represented in about fifteen manuscripts from the last half of that century alone, and was even obliquely referenced in Julian of Norwich's *Revelation of Love*, a notoriously non-citational text.[57] Even more popular—"hard to overestimate . . . both in England and on the continent"—were the Pseudo-Bernardine *Meditationes piissimae de cognitione humanae conditionis* ("*Pious Meditations on the Understanding of the Human Condition*"), an important source for Pope Innocent III's influential treatise *De miseria humanae condicionis* ("*On the Misery of the Human Condition*")[58] and undoubtedly the most circulated Bernardine or Pseudo-Bernardine[59] material in thirteenth and fourteenth century England (Bestul, "Devotional Writing" 23).[60] This is the source that, along with Innocent's treatise itself, dominates the first few parts of the *Prick of Conscience* (Morey, "Introduction" 1), the most widely circulated long poem in Middle English.

[56] As Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson point out, "the body of twelfth-century Cistercian mystical writings . . . are the fountainhead for virtually all late medieval writing in this vein of 'bridal mysticism'—particularly Bernard of Clairvaux's *Sermons on the Song of Songs*" (25). These *Sermons* play a vital role in the *Ancrene Wisse* and *The Wooing of Our Lord*. As we will see, one of them is also used in Chaucer's *Parson's Tale*.

[57] Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins observe: "Truer than many visionary writings to the logic of their genre, which attends to what can be known through a chosen individual's experience, rather than through the authoritative teachings of others, [Julian's writings] say almost nothing directly about their intellectual affiliations" (6).

[58] Donald R. Howard judges that this treatise influenced Innocent's *De miseria* "more than any other." According to Howard, the *Meditationes* argues that "the prime requirement of repentance . . . is self-knowledge," a point that its author drives home by undertaking "a treatment of man's nature from his birth, his conduct in life, and his manner of death" (xxix).

[59] Thomas H. Bestul warns that "the understanding of Bernard as a medieval devotional writer cannot derive only from his authentic *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, but must be completed by taking into account the enormous number of devotional treatises that circulated under his name." To strictly separate out Bernardine from Pseudo-Bernardine texts is to unduly restrict "the meaning of Bernard as signifier within the realm of medieval culture and society" (*Texts of the Passion* 15). I strongly agree. Tracing the influence of Bernardine and Pseudo-Bernardine texts together will help us see how the two mix together to generate some of the most impactful "signifiers" in late medieval English literature.

[60] In another article, Bestul describes the *Meditationes piissimae* as "among the most widely circulated Latin works of any genre in fourteenth-century England" ("Chaucer's Parson's Tale" 603).

Despite its wide-ranging influence, however, the *Meditationes* has gone largely under-studied, and has not been seriously considered in assessments of Bernard's legacy.[61] Describing its decisive influence on the Middle English lyric *Sayings of St. Bernard* as they appear in the Bodleian Library's MS Laud Misc. 108, J. Justin Brent notes that the *Meditationes* develop "the idea of ascent to God through self-knowledge," addressing a "monastic audience" on the theme of the "inward search for divine salvation"; on the other hand, "The Middle English derivatives . . . focus almost exclusively on the admonitory sections of this work," and therefore often lack "the contemplative speculation that characterized its source" (161). Beyond what Brent claims, however, the "contemplative speculation" of the *Meditationes* treatise is in fact already diminished, marked by a somewhat piecemeal, inconsistently applied recapitulation of the Augustinian idea of the trinity's imprint on the mind—a schema with which Bernard often showed himself familiar,[62] but that was articulated with more consistency in the work of his friend and eventual fellow Cistercian, William of St. Thierry.[63] Whereas Bernard tends to invoke "personal experience" in a role that was played more consistently for Augustine and for William by memory[64]—the faculty of the mind that all three theologians consistently identify with the Father and the Father's power[65]—in the *Meditationes piissimae* the Augustinian trinitarian

[61] Takami Matsuda's article "The Reception and Influence of ps.-Bernardine Meditationes Piissimae in Middle English" surveys the importance of the *Meditationes* for Middle English writing in general, drawing on the work of Robert Bultot. David Aers has also recently cited the *Meditationes* treatise approvingly in his book *Versions of Election*.

[62] See, for instance, Bernard's sermon *De conversione*: "For the soul itself is nothing but reason, memory, and will" ("Denique tota ipsa (anima) nihil est aliud quam ratio, memoria et voluntas") (VI.11; IV:84). The formula is also repeated several times in the *Sermones super cantica canticorum*.

[63] M.-D. Chenu observes that "William of Saint-Thierry preserved the features of Augustinian thought more carefully [than Bernard]" (61).

[64] See the first of Bernard's *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, which begins with an invitation to "look back on your own experience" ("vestram experientiam advertatis"), to "learn by what you experience that man's life on earth is a ceaseless warfare" ("sicut militiam esse vitam hominis super terram incessanter experimini in vobismetipsis"), and to recognize that "only experience" can "teach" the meaning of the Song ("sola addiscit experientia"), "the fruit of all the other [songs]" ("ceterorum omnium ipsum . . . fructus") (1.9-11; I:6-7).

[65] As Roland Teske observes, "The primacy of memory for Augustine's account of human cognition is seen from its analogy with the Father who is first in the Trinity" (157). In Augustine's more approximately analogous trinity of

schema tends to give way to a set of agonistic binaries. Centered on the crucial Pauline distinction between *spiritus* and *caro*, the spirit and the flesh—tellingly elided at times with the less obviously symbolical opposition between *anima* and *corpus*, the soul and the body[66]—the *Meditationes* begins by making a distinction between *exteriora* and *interiora*, then proceeds to dichotomize everything in its path, culminating in a strong distinction on the institutional level between *saeculum* and *claustrum*, the world and the cloister. Unlike even Bernard's most ideologically motivated writings, the *Meditationes* is often plainly dualistic on its surface, and is as dramatic an example as one could ask for of what M.-D Chenu described in terms of a Christianized "Platonic dualism," overshadowing the "biblical feeling for historical actuality" with a "radical indifference . . . to the world of concrete things" (64).[67]

What results might be fairly described as a "crusading" mentality, transposed into the key of internal division and implicit violence. Where *anima* merely dominates and denigrates *corpus*, and *claustrum* simply excludes and looks down upon *saeculum*, existence itself comes to be construed as an endless war to master what the text itself describes as the "domesticum hostem," the "familiar enemy" of the body and the flesh (XIII.35), and the soul is summoned to a constant

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the "outer man," the role of the Father is played by the object seen, whereas the Son corresponds with vision and the Spirit with the act of looking that holds them together (*De Trinitate* 11.2). This illustrates the enigmatic role of memory and of the Father, which Henri de Lubac in turn aligns with anagogy and the theological virtue of hope (181): it is as if the whole system depends on something that is never fully present within it. Likewise, in the soul memory is not something I have, but something I am; and yet my memory is never fully, transparently present to me. The reduction of the importance of memory tends to obscure this paradox.

[66] A desire to avoid this sort of dualistic theological impasse may be one reason why Langland revises the C-Text of *Piers Plowman* to propose *Liberum Arbitrium*, rather than *Anima*, as the Dreamer's climactic guide to self-understanding. Nicholas Watson argues that Langland's "figure of lay sinfulness, Haukyn or *Activa Vita*, a minstrel and provider of communion wafers" shows the poet, like Chaucer and Julian in their own different ways, echoing a lay "incarnational theology" that "assumed that the world Christ redeemed was a world of sinners." Watson compares this figure to Chaucer's Host ("Christian Ideologies" 79). As I will argue in Chapter Three, I think the comparison between the Host and Langland's Nede is at least as suggestive.

[67] According to Chenu, Augustine "favored a theology of grace . . . through personal encounter between God and man, irrespective of the order or disposition or intelligibility of nature; nature became thereby a mere field for man's interior experience" (64). Whether or not this is true of Augustine or of Bernard, Chenu's remarks could serve as an apt introduction to the Pseudo-Bernardine *Meditationes piissimae*. In my view, Bernard's authentic thought more typically and originally substitutes the ambiguous category of "personal experience" both for the neglected Augustinian "memory" and for a more general attention to the "world of concrete things."

state of emergency, since "mihi subjugari non potero" ("I am not able to subjugate myself") (IX.24).[68] As a result, "omnia timeo" ("I fear all things") (XII.34). In terms of the monk's recommended self-understanding, this unending internalized conflict issues in the overriding dominance of an unhappy, self-accusing "worm of conscience" ("conscientiae vermem") (III.10), a phenomenon distinctly at odds with the careful balance between presumption and despair, fear and hope, awareness of judgment and awareness of mercy, that was consistently recommended by St. Bernard.[69] As we will see, this gnawing worm, which haunts and shadows without quite overwhelming William Langland's *Piers Plowman*,[70] would eventually determine the whole shape and program of the very dour, very popular *Prick of Conscience*, thereby cementing itself as an essential feature in the landscape of Middle English "vernacular theology." It is to that landscape, and the place of the *Meditationes piissimae* in it, that I will now turn.

[68] I will cite the *Meditationes piissimae de cognitione humanae conditionis* by chapter and section number. Reference is to the *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 184, cols. 485-508b. Translations are my own. For this reason, and because I read the *Meditationes* more closely than some of my other Latin sources, I have provided the Latin text first in this case. The *Meditationes* needs an English translation.

[69] In his sixth sermon on the Song of Songs, for example, Bernard speaks of "those spiritual feet of God to which the penitent's first kiss ought to be directed" ("illos spirituales pedes Dei, quos primo loco spiritualiter osculari paenitentem oportet"): "Let us call one of these feet mercy, the other judgment" ("quorum alterum misericordiam, alterum iudicium nominemus") (6.6; I:28-9).

[70] As I referenced at the beginning of this chapter, in the "apologia" passage original to the C-Text of *Piers* Langland's Will sets his own obscure sense of what God wants him to do—"For in my conscience Y knowe what Crist wolde Y wrouhte" (C.V.83)—against the strident demands of a more thoroughly allegorized, accusatory "Conscience." My above reading would at least partly equate this latter, more reified Conscience roughly with the "worm of conscience" that dominates the *Meditationes piissimae* and the *Prick of Conscience*. I do not think it is a coincidence that *Piers* ends with the conversion and humbling of the poem's more strictly allegorical figure for conscience.

Chapter 3

"Bernard the monk ne saugh nat all"

Chaucerian theology and the Bernardine tradition

I can no longer hide the fact that for the second time he who is from heaven speaks of the earth so agreeably and so intimately, as if he were someone from the earth.

("Minime iam dissimulare queo, quod ecce secundo is, qui de caelo est, de terra loquitur: utique tam dignanter, tam socialiter, quasi unus e terra.")

— Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones super cantica canticorum*, 59

Following the opening line that was reproduced in *Piers Plowman*—"Multi multa sciunt, et seipsos nesciunt" ("Many know many things, and do not know themselves")—the popular Pseudo-Bernardine *Meditationes piissimae de cognitione humanae conditionis* begins by neatly dividing the world into two categories: the "exteriora" by means of which those misguided "many" search for God, and the "interiora, quibis interior est Deus" ("inner things, than which God is more inner"), through which He really should be sought. The journey inward begins with a conventionally Augustinian relation of the faculties of the mind to the three persons of the Trinity: "Secundum interiorem hominem tria in mente mea invenio, per quae Deum recolo, conspicio, et concupisco. Sunt autem haec tria, memoria, intelligentia, voluntas sive amor. Per

memoriam reminiscor: per intelligentiam intueor; per voluntatem amplector" ("According to the inner man I find three things in the mind, through which I recollect, discern, and desire God. These three are memory, intelligence, and the will, or love. Through the memory I remember; through intelligence I perceive; through the will I embrace") (I.1).[1] The second section of this first chapter relates this theme explicitly to the image of God in the mind: "Repraesentemus ergo in nobis imaginem ejus in appetitu pacis, in intuitu veritatis, et in amore charitatis. Teneamus eum in memoria, portemus in conscientia, et ubique praesentem veneremur. Mens siquidem nostra . . . ejus imago est" ("Therefore we represent in ourselves His image: in the desire for peace, in the consideration of the truth, and in the love of charity. Let us hold Him in memory, carry Him in conscience, and everywhere revere Him as present. For our mind . . . is His image") (I.2). This latter formula begins the *Meditationes*' gradual, significant swerve away from the traditional Augustinian schema: "conscientia" silently replaces the term "intelligentia," which was used in the earlier passage. If the verb "veneremur" describes the activity of the third faculty of the mind, simply replacing the noun—"voluntas sive amor"—then "conscientia" stands in a more liminal position, introducing a new term for the intelligence that also seems to overlap somewhat with memory's role of "holding" God.

The key term "conscientia" comes to dominate the treatise more and more as it goes on. Here it appears to mark the place between passivity and activity, the middle position where what is remembered is carried over into actionable form.[2] By the end of the treatise, however,

[1] As in Chapter Two, I will cite the *Meditationes piissimae de cognitione humanae conditionis* by chapter and section number. Reference is to the *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 184, cols. 485-508b. Translations are my own.
[2] In this way it might be compared with Marshall Leicester's term "practical consciousness," which is said to exist "in the area between discursive consciousness and the unconscious" (19) and which, according to its coiner Anthony Giddens, "consists of all the things which actors know tacitly about how to 'go on' in the contexts of social life without being able to give them direct discursive significance" (qtd. in Leicester 19). This mode of consciousness, Leicester says, "has largely to do with matters of routine and habit"; it is defined by Pierre Bourdieu as "habitus, the disposition or way of holding oneself vis-à-vis the social world of institutionalized practices that enables agents to negotiate its vicissitudes" (qtd. in Leicester 20). The term plays a critical role in Leicester's analysis of *The*

"conscientia" has become a site of perpetual self-recrimination and even of self-torture; one chapter heading describes conscience as "remordentis," biting, gnawing, and the chapter begins with the author's lament that "Peccata mea celare non possum, quoniam quocunque vado, conscientia mea mecum est, secum portans quidquid in ea posui, sive bonum sive malum. . . .Sic, in domo propria, et a propria familia habeo accusatores, testes, judices et tortores. Accusat me consciencia, testis est memoria, ratio judex, voluptas carcer, timor tortor, oblectamentum tormentum. . . .nam inde punimur, unde delectamur" ("I am not able to hide my sins, because wherever I go, my conscience is with me, carrying with it whatever I have put there, whether good or evil. . . .Thus, in my own house, and from among my own family I have accusers, witnesses, judges, and torturers. Conscience accuses me, memory is the witness, reason the judge, pleasure the jail, fear the torturer, delight, the torment. . . .For we are punished, there where we delight") (XI.32).[3] When it is specifically described as a "worm" earlier on—"In carne

Canterbury Tales, because Leicester believes that "a great many effects of Chaucer's text . . . are produced in the undecidable area between conscious and unconscious." Its interest for my study lies more specifically in the way "the distinction between unconscious and preconscious is a function of the operation of memory." According to Leicester, the Freudian idea of the preconscious was introduced to describe "the status of material that is not conscious in the descriptive (or discursive) sense but is not repressed, such as memories that are not immediately conscious" (19). Leicester equates this realm with the kind of knowledge necessary to tell a story, speak a language, or drive a car (20). This is exactly the kind of identity-grounding awareness that tends to be neglected when the Augustinian idea of memory as one of the three definitive faculties of the mind is forgotten; Bernard's "personal experience" and the Pseudo-Bernardine "conscience" represent two possible replacements for it. I favor Bernard's term over the Pseudo-Bernard's or Leicester's, because "conscience" and "practical consciousness" both tend to perform the very abstraction and disembodiment that "memoria" itself so firmly resists. To say "I am my memory" is not the same as to say "I am my preconscious practical skills," or even "I am my conscience," where conscience is construed as a kind of sidelined moral umpire. "I am my experience" more firmly resists the reduction of the person to sheer intelligence and will.

[3] This passage marks a significant distortion of the treatise's Bernardine sources. The closest passage in Bernard's genuine work is found his second sermon for the feast of the Assumption: "Seized from the very beginning by conspiracy and foul betrayal, my soul was handed over as a prisoner in her own home, and her torturers were none other than those of her own household. For conscience was the prison, and reason and memory the torturers, and they are cruel, stern, and pitiless. . . .But blessed is the Lord, who has not given me as prey to their teeth!" ("Ab ipso nempe coniurationis et proditionis pessimae deprehensa principio, non alibi quam in domo propria carcerali est mancipata custodiae, nec aliis quam suae illius familiae data tortoribus. Erat enim illi conscientia carcer, erant tortores ratio et memoria, atque hi quidem crudeles, austeri et immisericordes. . . .Sed benedictus Deus, qui non dedit me in captionem dentibus eorum") (4; V:234). The *Meditationes* characteristically excises the rhetorical context, and adds the extra note about the soul's being punished specifically for its pleasure.

cruciabuntur per ignem, in spiritu per conscientiae vermem" ("In the flesh they will be tortured by fire, in the spirit through the worm of conscience")—the pangs of conscience are identified with a state of living-in-death: "Sic tamen morientur, ut semper vivant; et sic vivent, ut semper moriantur" ("Nonetheless they will die in such a way that they are always living; and they will live in such a way that they are always dying") (III.10). This earlier passage explicitly describes the state of the damned in hell, but is in fact characteristic of the way the soul's experience of its own conscience is depicted throughout. A constant state of anxiety is both recommended and deliberately induced by the *Meditationes piissimae*, which presses the soul toward an early acquaintance with the gnawing "worm of conscience" and out of any provisional state of peace to which the "appetitus pacis," associated in the treatise's first section with the faculty of memory, might otherwise have led it. For souls in this unsettled state, "conscience" names the place in the mind where the distinction between death and life blurs together into an undifferentiated experience of gnawing fear—as opposed to the place where, as in the treatise's first chapter, the memory of God shades into the revering of Him in all things. Augustine's trinitarian schema collapses into a practical dualism, where the self's conscience stands in despairing judgment against itself. Memory is reduced to a passive witness.

As we have seen in Chapter Two, conscience is a key figure in William Langland's *Piers Plowman*. In this chapter, I will argue for the importance of this and other key themes from the *Meditationes piissimae* for Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* as well—in particular, the broader categories of dualism and despair. In my view, Chaucer not only engages with the theological problem of dualism and its experiential corollary in despair; he deliberately constructs a counter-theology, embedded in his poetics, that responds with real originality to these problems as they were presented in some of the most popular theological works of his time. From the possible

citations of the *Prick of Conscience* to his alleged translations of a sermon on Mary Magdalene and of Innocent's *De miseria humanae condicionis* treatise, the record of Chaucerian engagement with explicitly religious sources tells us significantly more about his theological sensibility, and about its centrality for his poetical project, than has been generally supposed. His possible engagement with the *Prick of Conscience* is amply documented in the study of the sources of *The Parson's Tale* on which the *Riverside Chaucer*'s notes are still based (Petersen). His engagement with Innocent's treatise in the Prologue to the *Man of Law's Tale* is unmistakably nuanced, and his multiple translations of Bernard's hymn to the Virgin from Dante's *Paradiso*, in addition to his early "ABC" to the Virgin, suggest a lively interest in Bernard and in Marian theology. More suggestive for my purposes, a manuscript that has long been associated with Chaucer contains even more potentially significant Chaucerian material than has been previously realized: in addition to the *De miseria* treatise and the Pseudo-Origen homily that Chaucer claims to have translated in his youth, Cambridge Peterhouse MS 219 contains, immediately following the homily, a copy of the *Meditationes piissimae* treatise, labeled "*Meditationes sancti bernardi*." The manuscript also contains some genuinely Bernardine material.[4]

In this chapter I will argue that Chaucerian theology should be understood in terms of a both significantly Bernardine and Pseudo-Bernardine context, best characterized in terms of a push-and-pull between the dualistic, "crusading" tradition represented by the *Meditationes* and more contemplative, authentically Bernardine works like the *De diligendo deo* ("*On Loving*

[4] See https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-PETERHOUSE-00219/244. The description observes that "some scholars . . . hypothesize the Peterhouse manuscript as one of several candidates for Chaucer's own copy of his source texts." The manuscript includes an excerpt from Bernard's thirty-sixth sermon on the *Song of Songs* that is labeled "Bernardus de cruce" (115v), and a copy of Bernard's *Homilae quattuor super Missus est*, also known as *Homilies in Praise of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (132v-145v). It also contains an extensive Bernardine miscellanea. I will discuss the *Missus est* sermons briefly in my Conclusion.

God") and the *Sermones super cantica canticorum* ("*Sermons on the Song of Songs*").[5] In *The Legend of Good Women* Chaucer jokes, "Bernard the monk ne saugh nat all" (F.16). But Chaucer did see something through Bernard, whether directly or indirectly, or even through misattributed works like the *Meditationes*. Beginning with the *Meditationes piissimae*, the single most significant source for the "figure of Bernard" in Middle English, I will attempt to describe what he saw.

Different shades of contemptus: Innocent III and the Pseudo-Bernard

It might be tempting to dismiss the dualistic gloom of the *Meditationes piissimae* as a mere matter of its inhabiting its *contemptus mundi* genre, but other works in the genre are not so unsparingly bleak. Pope Innocent III's treatise *De miseria humanae condicionis*, which Chaucer's Man of Law re-shapes to warn that his audience should "Be war, therfore, er thou come to that prikke" of poverty (II.119),[6] draws on the *Meditationes* extensively, but qualifies its grim pronouncements with certain key mitigating features. Although Innocent's *De miseria* does its own fair share of disparaging the body—"[The just man] endures the world as an exile, shut up in the body as in a prison" ("Sustinet seculum tanquam exsilium, clausus in corpore tanquam

[5] Christopher Holdsworth records that the three medieval English Cistercian monasteries with surviving book lists held six copies of the *De diligendo deo* treatise, as much as any other, and four of the *Sermones super cantica canticorum*. In English cathedrals and monasteries surveyed in the late thirteenth century *Registrum Librorum Anglie*, the *Sermones* were by far the most popular of Bernard's works, and are recorded in 28 libraries. The *De diligendo* and Bernard's *Apologia* to William come in second, with 14 copies documented (172). The fact that both Gilbert of Hoyland and Baldwin of Ford attempted to continue the *Sermones* testifies to the influence of the work in England (175). The *Registrum* records that a copy was held at Canterbury Cathedral, among many other places (Bell, *An Index* 22).

[6] Innocent's pathetic representation of poverty is in fact amplified by the Man of Law with an original couplet: "If thou noon aske, with nede artow so woundid / That verray nede unwrappeth al thy wounde hid!" (II.102-3). A ventriloquized warning against ignoring the needy is also added to his source: "Parfay . . . somtyme [the poor man's neighbor] rekene shal, / What that his tayl shal brennen in the gleede, / For he noght helpeth needfulle in hir neede" (II.110-2). However, the Man of Law's translation eventually swerves away from these themes to warn against poverty and to praise the "prudent" merchant, who is careful not to be poor (II.123). As I will argue, "nede" is a key term for Chaucer's theology, as it is for Langland's. The Man of Law's praise of selfish prudence and forgetting of temperance is in fact exactly the sort of thing that Langland's Nede warns Will against.

in carcere") (I.18; 23)[7]—and announcing the omnipresence of death—"The future is forever being born, the present forever dying, and what is past is utterly dead. We are forever dying while we are alive; we only cease to die when we cease to live" ("Semper enim futura nascuntur, semper presentia moriuntur, et quidquid est preteritum totum est mortuum. Morimur ergo semper dum vivimus, et tunc tantum desinimus mori cum desinimus vivere") (I.23; 26)—it also includes a long central section on the vices, which focuses its energies on curtailing injustice through self-discipline; the whole arena of social existence, and even the natural world, opens up as a realm in which one must strive to do right by nature and by others, despising the world in a sense that makes it possible to love it better in another. Innocent complains of the glutton, for instance, that "the fruits of the trees, the different kinds of vegetables, the roots of various plants, the fishes of the sea and beasts of the earth, the birds of the heavens—none of these are enough . . . but he must pick out colors, compare aromas, fatten up plump birds" ("non sufficiunt fructus arborum, non genera leguminum, non radices herbarum, non pisces maris, non bestie terrae, non aves celi; sed queruntur pigmenta, comparantur aromata, nutriuntur altilia") (II.17; 45). Innocent's glutton here is not called to despise all these earthly things in themselves; rather, through the temperate discovery of "enough" he is called to enjoy them more fully, and so to better appreciate them for what they really are.

The same distinction applies to the realm of human relations: elsewhere in the *De miseria* Innocent writes against selfish ambition, "For it is not through honors but through onerous service that one arrives at the Kingdom" ("Non enim honore, sed onere pervenitur ad regnum") (II.35; 60). In the *Meditationes*, the "onerous"-ness of Christian self-denial comes to seem almost

[7] I will cite Innocent's *De miseria* first by book and chapter number, according to Michele Maccarrone's edition of the Latin text; then, following a semicolon, by the corresponding page number in Donald R. Howard's translation of the text, which I have used here. An earlier edition of the text is available in the *Patrologia Latina* at Vol. 217, cols. 701-746b.

the whole point of virtue, as if pleasure in itself merited punishment, and the arena of service to God and to others recedes far into the background. Likewise, fleshly vices like gluttony appear as the natural outworkings of essentially corrupt equipment, rather than the abuse of the God-given, sensible goods of nature and of the body.[8] This is most clear in the treatise's vivid description of our conception "de vili materia factus, vilissimo panno involutus, menstruali sanguine in utero materno . . . nutritus" ("made of vile matter, swaddled in the vilest garment, nourished by menstrual blood in the maternal womb"), which is followed up immediately with an inventive description of the body's being eaten by worms after death—"Sic in non hominem vertitur omnis homo" ("Thus every human is turned into a non-human") (III.8)—and which perhaps not unpredictably issues in an overwhelming sense of the sheer burdensomeness of existence: "ego ipse mihi sarcina sum" ("I am a burden to myself") (X.27). The treatise's strong prospective emphasis on the non-human to which we are all eventually reduced prompts the speaker to imagine and even inhabit his own annihilation: "sicut aqua effusus sum, et ad nihilum redactus sum, praeteritorum obliviscens, praesentium negligens, futura non providens" ("I am as water poured out, and I am brought to nothing; forgetting the past, neglecting the present, and not providing for the future") (X.30).[9] Time itself evaporates, along with the speaker's burdensome selfhood; the treatise itself tends toward nonbeing, structuring a subjectivity that almost deliberately declines toward the "non hominem": "Si me non inspicio, nescio meipsum: si autem me inspicio, tolerare me non possum" ("If I do not examine myself, I do not know myself;

[8] Emero Stiegman's doctoral dissertation centers on the related question of Bernard's alleged "negativism": "the denial for invalid reasons of the reality or worth of some elements of man's life and experience—the condemnation, for example, of inclinations that are not sinful" (*The Language of Asceticism* 2). Stiegman believes this in general to be an anachronistic misconception of what he terms Bernard's "asceticism."

[9] It is worth pointing out that this passage begins a conventional scriptural citation of Psalms 21.15—"sicut aqua effusus sum"—that Bernard himself uses in his own second sermon *In Quadragesima*, for the beginning of Lent (2; IV:361). However, the *Meditationes* characteristically bends the passage toward articulating a self-absorbed despair it does not mitigate or transcend.

if, however, I do examine myself, I am not able to tolerate myself") (X.31). There is no obvious solution other than ceasing to exist.

Viewed in isolation, these passages are all still relatively conventional. The difference between the "contempt" recommended by Innocent's treatise and that which is depicted and enacted in the *Meditationes* is reflected on its deepest level by a relative imbalance in the works' respective capacities for anagogical reflection. An early section in the third and final book of Innocent's *De miseria* pauses to dwell on "the Coming of Christ on the Day of Any Man's Death" ("adventu Christi ad diem mortis cuiuslibet hominis"): "We read about four comings of Christ. Two are visible: the first in the flesh, the second at judgment. And two are invisible: the first in the soul through grace . . . and the second at the death of each of the faithful. . . .Wherefore death is called a meeting, because Christ comes to meet the soul" ("Quatuor namque leguntur adventus Christi. Duo visibiles: in carne primus, ad iudicium secundus. Et duo invisibiles: primus in mente per gratiam . . . alter in obitu uniuscuiusque fidelis . . . Unde dicitur obitus, quia obviam venit ei Christus") (III.3; 69-70). When this passage directly precedes a reflection "On the Putrefaction of the Dead Body" ("De putredine cadaverum") (III.4; 70), Innocent's own observations on the body's corruptibility and the gnawing "worm of conscience" ("Vermis conscientie") (III.5; 72) take on a very different cast than they do in the course of the more purely rebarbative *Meditationes*.[10] The first of Innocent's two "invisible" comings of Christ in fact precisely corresponds with Henri de Lubac's anagogical *invisibilia*, neglected according to de Lubac in the scholastic era and in my view already in danger of being lost—in a much more intensely self-reflexive way—in the more traditionally monastic spirituality of the

[10] In this respect, it is worth remembering that the *Meditationes piissimae* is itself a compilation, collecting fragments of Ambrose, Augustine, Boethius, and Seneca, among others (Wittig 212). I am analyzing it here as a complete work with a certain gestalt spirituality, because I am attempting to trace the influence of the whole treatise and the idea of an authorial "Bernard" it might have constructed for its readers.

Meditationes piissimae, where the presence of Christ "in the soul through grace" is at best a minor theme, and an obsession with the anagogical *futura* takes precedence.[11] It is this sense of the pervasiveness of the eternal *invisibilia* in time, and first "in the flesh," that the *Meditationes* systematically neglects and which, as we will see, Chaucer creatively represents and re-purposes.

An early passage in the *De miseria humanae condicionis* captures the relative complexity of Innocent's more anagogically and incarnationally inflected vision: "And God addresses man: 'Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return.' 'I am compared to mud and likened to embers and ashes.' Now, mud is made of water and dirt, both remaining what they are; but ashes are made of fire and wood, both being consumed. In this a mystery is revealed" ("Hinc et Deus dicit ad hominem: 'Cinis es, et in cinerem reverteris.' 'Comparatus sum, ait, luto et assimilatus sum faville et cineri.' Lutum efficitur ex aqua et pulvere, utroque manente; cinis autem fit ex igne et ligno, utroque deficient. Expressum misterium") (I.2; 7). For the *De miseria*, despite its evident similarities to and direct dependence on the *Meditationes*, even our "being consumed" takes on a mysteriously regenerative significance, like ashes burned by fire; and even the corruptible nature of the body is implicitly involved in this creative consumption. In this light, even mankind's damnation has something to do with its inherent dignity: "But with the wicked He will be angry forever, for it is just and right that those who go astray in *their* portion of eternity shall have God's wrath throughout *His* eternity" ("Reprobis autem Deus irascitur eternaliter, quia iustum es ut quod impius in suo prevaricatur eterno, Deus ulciscatur in suo") (III.13; 80). It is mankind's capacity for acts of eternal significance, its being able to do what it will with its "portion of

[11] As I mentioned in passing in Chapter Two, de Lubac sees a "lack of the eschatalogical sense" as "the most crucial defect arising from scholasticism," emerging "precisely from the fact that theology then no longer has the form of an exegesis" (195). The same might be said of the *Meditationes piissimae*. The treatise does not really interpret the body, or conscience, much less Scripture; rather, it assumes a self-abasing hermeneutic—"Cogita itaque de Deo quidquid melius potes, et de te quidquid deterius vales" ("Think therefore of God the best that you are able, and of yourself whatever is worst") (VI.18)—and smuggles a constantly self-recriminating "conscience" in for the Augustinian operation of intelligence or reason.

eternity," that raises it to the dignity of being damned. The *Meditationes piissimae*, on the other hand, practically suffocates this sense of mankind's eternal significance, and of its freedom to accept or reject it; all that remains is the vileness of the body, the collapsed nothingness of past and present and future, and the self as burdensome to itself: "ego ipse mihi sarcina sum." If the peculiar word "sarcina" recalls its one use in the Vulgate Bible—"Narratio fatui quasi sarcina in via: nam in labiis sensati inveniatur gratia" ("The speech of a fool is like a burden in the way: but on the lips of the wise grace may be found") (Sirach 21.19)—then the *Meditationes* again leaves out one side of its Biblical and patristic formulas, recalling the speech of a fool but not the lips of the wise, mankind's misery but not its dignity, the danger of presumption but not of despair. Along with its eventual displacement of both memory and intelligence in favor of the accusatory "worm of conscience," this demonstrates the treatise's excision of everything aligned with the theological virtue of hope, and with the bodily "mystery" of mortality and corruption that Innocent illustrates with ash and fire.[12]

There is, however, at least one key respect in which the *Meditationes piissimae* is a markedly more complex text than the *De miseria*. At one of the *Meditationes*' highest pitches of self-accusation, it abruptly turns to address a particular reader: "Statue te ante te, tanquam ante alium; et sic temetipsum plange. . . .Cumque coram eo in lacrymis te maceraveris, precor te ut memor sis mei" ("Stand before yourself, as before another; and thus lament for yourself. . . .And when in [God's] presence you vex yourself with tears, I pray that you remember me") (V.14). A long biographical section follows on this oddly personal aside:

[12] As I also mentioned in a footnote in Chapter Two, Henri de Lubac theorizes the alignment between exegetical modes and the theological virtues, and specifically associates the anagogical sense with the virtue of hope: "After allegory which built up faith and tropology which built up charity, there is anagogy which builds up hope" (181).

Ego enim ex quo cognovi te, in Christo diligo te. . . .Ad altare namque Dei cum peccator sto, sed sacerdos, tui me comitatur memoria. . . .Ibi recordatione tecum esse praesens desidero. . . .Nec mireris, si dixi, Praesens: quoniam si me amas, et ideo amas, quia imago Dei sum, ita tibi praesens sum, ut tu ipse tibi. . . .Imago enim Dei est omnis anima rationalis. Proinde qui in se imaginem Dei quaerit, tam proximum quam se quaerit: et qui illam in se quaerendo invenerit, in omni homine eam cognoscit. . . .Si ergo te vides, me vides, qui nihil aliud sum quam tu. Et si Deum diligis, me imaginem Dei diligis: et ego Deum diligendo, diligo te.

("For since I have known you, in Christ I have loved you. . . .And when I stand before the altar of God, a sinner but a priest, your memory accompanies me. . . .There in recollection I desire to be present with you. . . .Do not wonder if I say "present," for if you love me, and for this reason you love, that I am the image of God, in this way I am present with you, as you are with yourself. . . .For every rational soul is the image of God. Therefore whoever seeks God's image in himself, seeks his neighbor as much as himself; and whoever, seeking that image in himself, finds it, recognizes it in every person. . . .Therefore if you see yourself, you see me, for I am nothing other than you. And if you love God, you love the image of God in me; and I, in loving God, love you.") (V.15)

This is the beating affective heart of the treatise, an unresolved affection and inconsistently applied insight that the rest of the text constantly complicates and resists. Like Jaufre Rudel's crusade singer, who judges that whoever "remains here full of delight / and does not follow God in (into) Bethlehem" will never "have prowess" (76-7; 36-8), the *Meditationes* author elsewhere militates against all pleasure and bodily desire, advocating instead for a kind of interiorized crusade against the flesh, the body, and the secular world outside of the cloister. And yet, in this

one passage, what Bernard might have called the "personal experience" of the speaker sweetly yields to a sense of shifting presence and absence that, like the mix of marriage and chastity that characterizes Bernard's interpretation of the *Song of Songs*, does not simply negate the stirrings of a homely and even fleshly desire; rather, it follows them through to their natural conclusion: in some mysterious way we are the same, and, in loving the image of God in ourselves, we find that we already love each other.

Of course, this idea is not consistently developed over the course of the *Meditationes piissimae*. Instead, the gradual decay of the trinitarian schema it sets out at its beginning culminates in the recommended crucifixion of the "vetus homo" ("old man") who "pro nihilo habet terram desiderabilem" ("holds the earth desirable for nothing") at the treatise's end (XV.39). The "domesticum hostem" ("familiar enemy") of the flesh becomes here implicitly also a *hostia* ("sacrifice") that must be offered up so that the soul may enter into the heavenly realm where "nulla omino necessitas. . . .Ibi est requies a laboribus, pax est ab hostibus" ("there is no need at all. . . .For there there is rest from labors, and peace from enemies") (XIV.37).[13] The Lord's assistance is requested at this sacrifice, which is not just a rejection of the flesh but, even explicitly now, of the body itself: "Adjuva me, Domine Deus meus, quoniam inimici mei animam meam circumdederunt: corpus scilicet, mundus, et diabolus. A corpore fugere non possum, nec ipsum a me fugare" ("Help me, Lord my God, because my enemies surround my soul: the body, that is, the world, and the devil. From the body I am unable to flee, nor may I put it to flight") (XII.33).[14] In an earlier passage, by the almost imperceptible resolution of the

[13] This passage could be compared with with Langland's treatment of "Nede" as it was analyzed in Chapter One, and with the Parson's discussion of "nede" in terms of the works of mercy near the end of his tale, which I will discuss below. The word evidently focalized something important for both Langland and Chaucer, whereas in the *Meditationes* it is only a limitation to be transcended.

[14] Siegfried Wenzel notes that Bernard "is responsible for a formula which became ubiquitous in the following centuries [after the twelfth]: 'The flesh offers me softness, the world vanities, the devil bitterness.'" Together Bernard and Hugh of St. Victor re-popularized the idea of these "three enemies" of the soul (166). Like the

Augustinian schema of memory, reason, and will into the more simplistic, manipulable binary of intellect and affect, the ground is cleared for the later separation of new man from old, inner man from outer, flesh from spirit and even body from soul: the blessed man, "in cujus conscientia peccatum inventum non fuerit" ("in whose conscience no sin will have been found"), "Videbit Deum ad voluntatem, habebit ad voluptatem, fruetur ad jucunditatem. In aeternitate vigebit, in veritate fulgebit, in bonitate gaudebit. . . .Semper libet eum aspicere, semper habere; semper in illo delectari, et illo perfrui. In illo clarificatur intellectus, et purificatur affectus ad cognoscendam et diligendam veritatem. Et hoc est totum bonum hominum, nosse scilicet et amare Creatorem suum" ("will see God at his will, hold Him at his pleasure, enjoy Him to his delight. In eternity he will flourish, in the truth he will shine, and in goodness he will rejoice. . . .He will be able to see Him always, and always hold; always in Him delighted, fully enjoying Him forever. In Him the intellect will be made clear, and the affect purified, for the understanding and love of the truth. And this is the whole good of men, to know and to love their Creator") (IV.11). The idea of memory as designating the place where God is held and embraced in the mind is progressively forgotten; a distant echo of it sounds in the verbs "vigebit" and "habere," recalling the identification of memory with God's own abiding power, the very ground of His existing, and yet the trinitarian schema comes overall to provide little more than a bare threefold formality, filled in now with dualistic content.[15]

Meditationes author, in developing this threefold scheme Bernard does occasionally elide the distinction between flesh and body. Interestingly, "Bernard in general seems to have set no store by the series of the capital vices" (171).

[15] David N. Bell observes how "*Memoria* . . . became for Augustine a theory of divine illumination and participation. . . .not simply a mental function directed towards the past, but the latent presence of God in the soul, and . . . the latent participation of the soul in God. Memory provides man with a certain innate knowledge of God which remains to be actualized, to be made explicit . . . and it acts as a force driving him on towards its realization" (*The Image and Likeness* 25-6).

The end product of all this is the widespread idea of the soul as split between intellect and affect, with one or the other tending inevitably to be prioritized.[16] In this brief paragraph it is possible to witness the process of degeneration by which the one schema is resolved into the other, the Augustinian complexity of memory as modeling the power of the Father withering away into a reduction of "memoria" to the threateningly static "book of conscience"—of which we are asked, in the treatise's final section, "Sed quid prosunt hae litterae admonitionis, nisi deleas de libro conscientiae tuae litteras mortis?" ("But what will these letters of exhortation profit you, unless you delete the letters of death from your book of conscience?") (XV.40). The inflexibility of this death-bearing text demands not just the deletion of sin, but of all fleshly existence, including the dangerously un-textual body.[17] It would perhaps even require, were it followed through to its logical conclusion, the deletion of the speaker's own threateningly changeable affection for the fellow monk to which the treatise is, if only in one oddly digressive section, directly addressed: "In monasterio namque saepe dum oro, non attendo quod dico. Oro

[16] James Simpson distinguishes between traditions stressing the "intellectual cognition of God" and "the voluntarist, affective tradition of theology," which he aligns with *Piers Plowman* ("From Reason to Affective Knowledge" 20). It might be useful to speak of a "memorialist" or "realist" tradition beyond this dichotomy, which could be aligned with the work of moderate realists like Aquinas and Chaucer's friend Ralph Strode. Although I foreground something like Bernard's importance as an "affective" theologian in Chapter Two, I believe Bernard's unique innovation lay in the way he stressed how intellect and affect correspond in the "experience" of God.

[17] Janet Coleman makes a similar observation of Bernard's authentic work, claiming that, where memory is concerned, Bernard "goes far beyond Augustine's teaching to make his distinctively monastic point": "For Bernard, all past events are to be censured. The memory stores up in its secret recesses the remembrance of past evil deeds. . . .For Bernard, man's memory is stained. It can only be purified by living the word. . . .Augustine's treasure house of memory has become a sewer for Bernard. The belly of Bernard's memory is congested with filth. . . .The soul, protected in the monastery, seeks to purify the memory. But even when the outward temptations have been eliminated by moving into the cloister, the memory remains so tainted that the source of evil is still within the soul. The heart of the struggle then, is to purify the memory from its stains; it must be blanched" (*Ancient and Medieval Memories* 181). Although Coleman is right to point out that Bernard's sermon *De Conversione* tends to reduce memory to a catalog of sins, making use of the same metaphor of the book of conscience (182), her conclusions are ultimately more applicable to the Pseudo-Bernardine *Meditationes piissimae* than to Bernard's genuine work. As Emero Stiegman's work in particular suggests, for the authentic Bernard the memory must be "blanched" only in the sense that its iterative recollection of its sins is to be more and more forgotten; the rich soil of "experience," and not just experience of books, is to be harvested in its place. Bernard is better understood as updating and filling in the gaps in an outmoded vocabulary than as throwing out memory altogether. As I will describe in my Conclusion, Bernard's sermons on Mary are one place where he elaborates his own idea of "memoria."

quidem ore, sed mente foris vagante, orationis fructu privor. Corpore sum interius, sed corde exterius: et ideo perdo quod dico" ("For in the monastery when I pray, I often do not attend to what I say. Indeed I pray with my mouth, but my mind is far away, and I deprive myself of the fruit of prayer. I am more inside myself than my body, but more outside than my heart; and therefore I miss what I say"). Approaching God in this in-between state, the monk commits a horrible act of presumption: "fetorem horribilem ejus aspectibus ingero" ("I bear a terrible stink before His countenance") (VIII.22). The *Meditationes* treatise therefore dissolves the difficult conjunction of body and soul, not into the ash that memorializes wood and fire of Innocent, but into a drifting, stinking fetor, which must be wafted away in favor of a tensed attentiveness to the recriminative book of conscience.[18] It dissolves itself as well; every distraction from that other, more unforgiving book must be erased.[19]

"More deth then lyfe as clerks demeth": The two Bernards in the *Prick of Conscience*

In at least one key respect, the *Prick of Conscience* is an accident. Embodying in the vernacular the *contemptus mundi* tradition from which the *Meditationes piissimae* and Innocent's *De miseria* treatise emerged, the most widely circulated poem in Middle English is at least in part a by-product of Innocent's infamous failure to complete the project he advertised in the *De miseria*'s Prologue: "I will henceforth, with Christ's favor, describe also the dignity of human

[18] I do not mean to set up a simplistic binary between body and book, time and text. Patricia Dailey describes the way that, "As with Bernard's *liber experientiae*, the mystic treats the vision as an experience that makes manifest scriptural truths. Far from being disembodied, the vision stages a moment of textual exegesis that is inextricable from its translation into embodied forms, eventually written into the material of life" (75). My sense is that the *Meditationes*, and the *Prick of Conscience* to an extent, tends itself to collapse this productive tension between exegesis and experience, text and body. The "liber conscientiae" as it appears in the *Meditationes piissimae* tends to insist that the anagogical account of our experience is simply identical with a textual accounting of our sins.
[19] Though I do not have time to draw them out here, there are clear parallels with Langland's treatment of Conscience, and broader themes of guilt and accountability, in *Piers Plowman*. The tearing of the pardon scene in particular seems to encapsulate anxieties over something like this textualization of conscience.

nature, so that, as in the present work the proud man is brought low, in that the humble man will be exalted" ("dignitatem humane nature Christo favente describam, quatinus ita per hoc humilietur elatus ut per illud humilis exaltetur") (Prologus; 3). Innocent never got around to exalting the humble man, and neither does the *Prick of Conscience*. The *Prick* does not even bear any trace of the *Meditationes*' oddly personal asides, nor is it quite as creatively dour in its denunciations of the body. Whereas the Pseudo-Bernardine Latin treatise acts as a compilational guide to monastic self-knowledge, with a specific if infrequently addressed cloistered audience, the *Prick of Conscience* is part of the fourteenth-century explosion of works of religious instruction in the vernacular and, like Langland's *Piers Plowman*, bears the marks of this era in its consisting of a series of Latin quotations around which the Middle English poetry itself gathers (Morey, "Introduction" 5). Unlike *Piers Plowman*, it is also unflaggingly didactic. As I have indicated above, the evidence for its direct influence on Chaucer, or presence in fragments in an intermediate text translated by Chaucer, is produced at length in the same monograph that firmly established the *Parson Tale*'s chief sources as Raymond of Pennaforte's *Summa de casibus poenitentiae* and Peraldus's *Summa de virtutibus et vitiis* (Petersen 78).[20] Careful attention to the way the *Prick* adopts and adapts the *Meditationes*' distinctive preoccupations—and to the way it represents Bernard, who appears explicitly in the *Prick* in a way he never does in the *Meditationes*—will therefore help us see how Chaucer himself responds to the most distinctive devotional themes of his era, and to the problems of dualism and despair that were raised by my reading of the *Meditationes* treatise and of Bernard's crusading legacy above.

Written somewhere in the first half of the fourteenth century, the *Prick of Conscience* exists in around 130 manuscript copies, as compared with 64 for the *Canterbury Tales* and some

[20] Petersen notes specific points of overlap on pages 7, 12-14, and 30 of her study. She lists a long sequence of parallels between the Parson's and the *Prick*'s accounts of the pains of hell on page 13.

200 for the Wycliffite Bible (Morey, "Introduction" 1).[21] Due perhaps to its dogged formal unremarkableness—a four beat line in rhyming couplets—and to the obviously derivative nature of its content—the poet himself boasts that his book is "on Ynglese drawen / Of sere materes þat er unknawen / Til laude men þat er unkunnand / Þat can na Latyn understand" (336-9)[22]—the poem has received relatively little critical attention, and still awaits the fulfillment of J.A. Burrow's wish that it should be "reabsorb[ed] . . . into the great spectacle of literature" (21). Although I am unlikely to do so here, I will at least suggest some ways in which the *Prick* can cast light on Chaucer's theological agenda and on the broader Bernardine tradition in general. I have already suggested that I see the *Meditationes* as a polemically moralistic reduction of that strong current of thought, and the *Prick* as a further reduction; but the *Prick* also pushes back against its own reductiveness, explicitly theorizing the balance between dread and love recommended by Bernard and, in one particularly odd and possibly original Bernardine citation, implying a lesson about God's mercy that goes against the grain of its otherwise unremittingly grim theological outlook. In the *Prick*, then, the authentically Bernardine anagogy of the *invisibilia* is haltingly rebooted and re-articulated, even as it is often drowned out by other, often Pseudo-Bernardine, *futura*-obsessed voices.

Bernard is the *Prick of Conscience*'s most cited authority from its 355-line Entre on through its Third Part, and the ambiguous "boke" to which the poet refers as his primary source throughout is, at least when the term is first used, maybe the *Meditationes* itself: "He þat right

[21] A recent count by Ralph Hanna has 170 complete or fragmentary manuscripts of the *Prick* (Cornelius 400).
[22] I cite the *Prick of Conscience* by line number, in parentheses, according to Ralph Hanna and Sarah Wood's edition of *Richard Morris's Prick of Conscience* for the Early English Text Society. I have also consulted James H. Morey's TEAMS edition of the *Prick*. Hanna and Wood note that none of the "'justifications' for ignoring *PC*"—such as its "unpleasant . . . doctrinal emphases," "unvarnished 'papist' theology" and defiantly "regional culture"—"really any longer merits much respect. Any text that survives in this number of copies must clearly have been central to the interests and aspirations of Middle English literary culture." They note that the poem "was known all over England (not to mention Anglo-Ireland) and even managed, as few Northern texts did, to penetrate, in an important context, metropolitan culture" (xiii-xiv).

ordir of lyfyng wil luke / Suld bygyn þus, als says þe boke: / To knaw first what hymself es, / Swa may he tyttest com to mekenes, / Þat es grund of al vertus to last, / On whilk al vertus may be sette fast" (205-10).[23] The poem's first citation of a Latin authority follows closely on this statement of theme, and on the observation that "som men has mykel letting, / Þhat lettes þam to haf right knawyng / Of þamselfe, þat þai first suld knaw" (237-9). There are, specifically, "four thynges" that "mase a mans wytt ofte blynd," and so "lettes" him that "hymself forgettes" (241-4):

> Of þis saynt Bernard witnes bers
> And er þa four wryten in þis vers:
> *Forma*, *favor populi*, *fervor iuvenilis*, *opesque*
> *surripuere tibi noscere quid sit homo*.
> Þat es, "favor of þe folk and fayrnes,
> And fervor of [yhouthe] and riches
> Reves a man sight, skylle, and mynde
> To knaw hymself, what he es of kynde." (245-52)

The Latin text incorporated here is from the Pseudo-Bernardine *Meditationes piissimae de cognitione humanae conditionis*, which is also directly referenced three times in the First Part of the poem, where Bernard and Innocent alone are cited as extra-scriptural sources. At the beginning of the *Prick of Conscience*, then, Bernard is introduced as the definitive voice of the *contemptus mundi* tradition, and as the great authority on the vices that keep sinners from the

[23] Other suggestive references to the poet's "book" in the First Part of the poem are to Scripture itself—Sirach and Job—but tend to coalesce around the theme of the worms' consuming the body that is also the topic of the first Bernardine citation in that part of the poem (904-919).

humble self-knowledge that would otherwise lead them "til mekenes and drede" (230). St. Bernard himself is the haunting presence that urges fear on the *Prick*'s readers.[24]

Of course, this emphasis on dread and self-knowledge was in itself entirely conventional, and at least in part an understandable "prick" toward taking the newly mandatory annual confession, and the virtue of humility itself, seriously. The unique innovation of the *Prick of Conscience* lay not so much in its introducing an entirely new category of material, as in its radically expanding on and re-emphasizing the already recommended awareness of the anagogical *futura* to which the *contemptus mundi* and fear of God themes were almost always tied. As the *Prick* author warns, vices "lette a man þat he noght sese / Þe perils of þe werld ne vanitese; / Ne of þe tym of dede þat es to com / Thynkes noght, ne of þe day of dom; / Ne he can noght undirstand ne se / Þe paynes þhat after þis lyfe sal be / … / Ne þe blise þat gude men er worthy" (261-8). Likewise, "For if he hymself knew kyndely, / He suld haf knawyng of God almighty, / And of his endyng thynk suld he / And of þe day þat last sal be" (221-4). Although the poem's first three, broadly Pseudo-Bernardine parts—like Innocent's *De miseria* treatise—describe and denounce the worldly vanities that come between the sinner and true self-knowledge in terms of an *ingressus*, *progressus*, and *egressus* schema of mankind's life, the final four parts of the poem focus entirely on the future things, situating them firmly at the center of

[24] For further uses of Bernard's authority in support of *contemptus mundi* themes, see the Middle English lyric "Sayings of St. Bernard," present in different forms in the Laud manuscript analyzed by Brent, and in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MSS Digby 86, Add. E.6 (R), Vernon MS, MS Harley 2253, and in the Auchinleck MS, where the poem's *ubi sunt* section is reproduced in isolation (Brent 162). A few representative lines from the MS Harley redaction capture the spirit of these *Meditationes*-inspired lyrics: "The holy man sayth in is bok / That mon is worm ant worms kok, / Ant worms he shal vede" (7-9). In the Vernon MS the theme of man's three foes—world, flesh, and devil—is announced in the poem's opening lines—"Her telle seynt Bernard / Mon hath threo enemy's hard" (1-2)—preceding the introductory worm stanza, whereas in Harley the opening stanza is more general. I have consulted the EETS edition of the text in the former case, and the TEAMS edition in the latter, and have cited by line number, in parentheses. The "Sayings" in the Vernon MS are available at pages 511-22 of the EETS edition, Part II, edited by F.J. Furnivall, and in the TEAMS edition of MS Harley 2253 at Volume 3, Art. 74.

its spirituality: purgatory, doomsday, hell, and heaven.[25] The *Prick* is therefore much more *futura*-oriented than either the *Meditationes piissimae* or Innocent's treatise, modeling a vision of the Christian life that consists almost entirely in thinking on judgment day and afterward.

In the First Part of the *Prick*, material from the *Meditationes* serves especially to reinforce the disgust for the body that is recommended as one of the foundations of humbled self-knowing, which in turn spurs the reader on to more strictly eschatological reflection. Three Pseudo-Bernardine citations cluster around this theme: first, "Saynt Bernard says, als þe buke telles, / Þat 'Man here es nathyng elles / Bot a foul slyme, wlatsom til men, / And a sekful of stynkand fen / And wormes fode' þat þai wald have, / When he es dede and layde in grave'" (562-7). A bit later on, "And þarfor says saynt Bernard right: / . . . / 'If þow wille,' he says, 'ententyfly se / And byhald what comes fra þe, / What thurgh mouthe, what thurgh nese como[n]ly, / And thurgh other overt[ur]es of [þe] body, / A fouler myddyng saw yhow never nane,' / Þan a man es, with flesche and bane" (619-29). The *Prick*'s final citation of the *Meditationes* arrives near the end of the poem's First Part, and marks a significant advance on the others:

> For saynt Bernard þos in metre says:
>
> *Post hominem, vermis; post vermem, fetor et horror,*
>
> *et sic in non hominem vertitur omnis homo.*
>
> "Aftir man," he says, "vermyn es,

[25] Giorgio Agamben's recent *Il Regno e il Giardino* ("*The Kingdom and the Garden*") argues that, for much of Christian thought, "Il Giardino deve essere rispinto in un arcipassato" ("The Garden must be driven back into an archaic past"), while "il Regno . . . viene proiettato nel futuro e spostato nei cieli" ("the Kingdom . . . gets projected into the future and displaced to the heavens"). According to Agamben, "Contro questa forzata separazione dei due poli, occorre ricordare . . . che il Giardino e il Regno resultano dalla scissione di un'unica esperienza del presente e che nel presente essi possono pertanto ricongiungersi" ("Against this forced separation of the two poles, it must be remembered that the Kingdom and the Garden stem from the splitting up of one single experience of the present, and that in the present they can still be rejoined") (119-20). In my view, Bernardine "experience," like Augustinian memory, attempts to do just that. Translations here are my own.

And aftir vermyn stynkand uglynes,

And swa sal ilk man turned be þan

Fra a man intil na man." (913-9)

Cumulatively, the First Part of the *Prick of Conscience* shifts the image of Bernard subtly from anatomizer of vice to grim mortician of the body's dead and living filth. The common theme is Bernard as preacher of humble self-knowledge: first, of the knowledge of one's self-deceiving tendencies, and second, of the repulsiveness of one's own bodily existence—both of which should humble us and bring us to the fear of God that, for the *Prick* poet, "may a lof bygyn" (345). The First Part's third and final citation of the *Meditationes* also picks up on one of the more subtle drifts in its source: the way it seeks to incite an almost existential dread in its reader, freely mixing body horror with the terror of contingent non-existence, the specter of the "non hominem" after death. This mixed fear of and longing for annihilation, faithfully reproduced in the vernacular, paves the way for the *Prick*'s later evacuation of the present in favor of the anagogical *futura* to come.

Although the *Meditationes* treatise is not cited again after the poem's First Part, passages much later on in the *Prick* suggest a continued sensitivity to its dominant themes: the Fifth Part's treatment of the book of Daniel's judgment day in terms of the "bokes" of "conscience," which record the sins that "Sal þam accuse, als þe boke bers wittnes. / For þair syns sal ay with þam last, / Als þai war bunden obout þair nekes faaste" (5449-57), and its untraced citation of "saynt Bernard . . . þe haly man" (5653) to the effect that, when the anagogical *futura* of judgment arrive, "'swa sal be na moment, / Of alle þe tyme þat God had sent, / Of whilk sal be made na pleynyng' / In þe tyme of þat last rekkenyng" (5660-3).[26] More so than in the *Meditationes* itself,

[26] This untraced citation is also reproduced, including the attribution to St. Bernard, in *The Parson's Tale* (X.253-4).

a self-conscious textuality is one marker of the poem's own drive to conceive of the final judgment in terms of a simple documentary cataloguing of sins, escaping the nuances of both Augustinian memory and Bernardine "experience." Knowledge of this judgment and punishment to come is itself doubly grounded in textual authority: "But of alle þa paynes can I noght say, / . . . / Bot yhit wille I speke somwhat mare / Of þe general paynes þat I shewed are, / And with som auctorites þam bynd, / Als men may in sere bukes writen fynd" (6585-90). The textual "auctorites" here "bynd" the catalogue of punishments already offered, "als þe boke bers wittnes"—reflecting the irreversibly written nature of conscience's accounting, and the damning permanence of the *Prick*'s own written word.

According to the *Prick*, the awareness that such an accounting will take place should issue in the soul's inhabiting a constant state of fearfulness: "Als þe haly man says, saynt Bernarde: / . . . / 'Wha . . . may þis lyfe here lede / Withouten tremblyng and drede?'" (2529-33). The *Prick of Conscience*, like the *Meditationes piissimae*, constructs the very "book of conscience" it theorizes, anticipating the anagogical *futura* with its own pseudo-anagogical, textual *visibilia*. And yet, as with the *Meditationes*' personal aside, there is at least one significant wrinkle. The poem's least conventional citation of St. Bernard comes in its Third Part, where a long deathbed sequence without apparent source in Bernard's biographies is described:[27]

> And in þe life of saynt Bernard,
>
> We rede þat when he drogh til dedeward,
>
> Þat þe devel þat es grisely and grym

[27] In the *Golden Legend,* for instance, Bernard asks his brothers to have mercy on one another as he always did on those who hurt him, and reports back to another abbot on the incomparability of the divine science: "Here is no science . . . but there above is plenty of science" (Vol. 5, 29). The *Vita Prima* leans on a fragment from Bernard's deathbed letter to Arnold of Bonneval (242-3).

Til hym come and asked hym

By what skille he wald and be what ryght

Chalange þe kyngdom of heven bright. (2248-53)

Bernard replies that he is indeed "unworthy" of salvation, but that he will nonetheless be saved because his "lorde Ihesu Crist" owns his soul "thurgh doble ryght"—that is, by virtue of his "Faders heritage" as Bernard's Creator and, of course, "Thurgh right of hys hard passioun / Þat he tholed for our raunson" (2255-63). "'Of was gyfte I chala[n]ge it by skille," Bernard says, "Als þe lagh of his mercy wille'" (2266-7). The devil disappears at once.

The stated moral of this strange deathbed sequence is that, if a saint of such stature as Bernard had to face the temptation of devils on his final day, we should all expect to face—and therefore fear—that final trial. And yet, the emphatic reference to the "lagh of his mercy" sounds a note that sits awkwardly beside the rest of the poem's many recommendations of the fear of God's just judgment, recalling the covenantal focus that William J. Courtenay and Richard Firth Green associated with Bernard's theological program. This is not the only such moment in the poem. Much as Bernard's sixth sermon on the *Song of Songs* warns that "a man who thinks only of the judgment will fall into the pit of despair" ("recordatio solius iudicii in baratrum desperationis pracecipiat") (6.8; I:30), the *Prick of Conscience* near the end of its Fifth Part on doomsday cautions its reader that "Na mon" should for fear of judgment "in dispayre be," for "alle þat has mercy here sal be save, / And alle þat here askes mercy sal it have, / Yf þai it seke whilles þai lyf bodily / And trewely trayste in Goddys mercy / . . . / And do mercy here and charite" (6290-7). Likewise, near the whole poem's end the otherwise implacably saturnine poet

explicitly recommends a salutary balance of dread and love,[28] for "þe drede es noght medeful to prufe, / Þat accordes noght halely with þat lufe, / For if drede stand by itself anely, / Na mede of God it es [þan] worthy. / Þarfor drede suld be lufes brother" (9488-92). The phrase "to prufe" even suggests something of a Bernardine theology of experience, of dread alone's having been tried and found wanting when it came to the "prufe." Whereas in the *Meditationes piissimae* the Augustinian view of the trinity's image in the mind, and the personal experience of loving one another in the image of God, slip just barely through the cracks of the otherwise gloomily existential, determinedly dualistic and anti-bodily treatise, in the *Prick of Conscience* such material as this commentary on dread and love sits simply and almost naively alongside the poem's literally thousands of lines of fear-mongering, *futura*-obsessed speculation on the horrors of hell and the conscience-wracking terrors of judgment day. It is not quite possible to say that one side of this very uneven equation is the "real" *Prick* and the other a mere ad hoc addition, for there is an at least conjectural intellectual coherence to its systematic balance of dread and love, however asymmetrically it may have been developed over the whole sprawling length of the poem. Certainly, "Þer er Bernard wordes þat says, / 'Al my lyfe here me flays, / . . . / It semes noght elles here until me / Bot owther syn þat þe saul mast deres / Or barran thyng þat na fruyt beres'" (2548-53). But in the *Prick of Conscience*, as in his writings, Saint Bernard said many things.[29]

[28] As I indicated in Chapter Two, this is a genuinely Bernardine theme. It is also, in my view, a typically paradoxical note, and indicative of the reason anagogical figures like Nede tend to be misread in one direction or the other. The metaphor of a chord is maybe better than that of "balance."

[29] As I have suggested in Chapter Two and in my Introduction, it is best to follow Yves Congar in asserting that the saint was "un orateur et une homme d'action, non un théologien des écoles" ("an orator and a man of action, not a theologian of the schools"). He was also a "contemplatif" (136) and, I would add, an artist.

"But thyng that wol nat be, lat it be stille": Chaucer's Private Christianity

Kate O. Petersen took note of several possibly direct or indirect citations of the *Prick of Conscience* in the *Parson's Tale* over a century ago, but this suggestion has not been pursued further, and the *Prick*'s potential influence on the Parson's Prologue has not been examined at all. There are significant points of possible contact.[30] The most direct such point comes in the Parson's apologetic preface to his tale: "But nathelees, this meditacioun / I putte it ay under correcioun / Of clerkes, for I am nat textueel; / I take but the sentence, trusteth weel. / Therfore I make protestacioun / That I wol stonde to correccioun" (X.55-60). This echoes almost exactly a pair of lines from the end of the *Prick of Conscience*: "And if any man þat es clerk, / Can fynde any errour in þis werk / I pray hym he do me þat favour / Þat he wille amende þat errour. / . . . / I make here a protestacion / Þat I wil stand til þe correccion" (9584-91). The *Prick* author also recalls the Parson in his wishing specifically that the "sentence" of his "tretice" will "Pryk and stirre a mans conscience" (9568-9), and in his fretting over his shortcomings in the realm of versification: "haf me excused at þis tyme, / If ye fynde defaut in þe ryme, / For I rek noght, þogh þe ryme be rude, / If þe maters þarof be gude" (9580-9583). Of course, in his tale itself the Parson does not versify at all; a "Southren man," he defensively protests that he "kan nat geeste 'rum, ram, ruf,' by lettre, / Ne, God woot, rym holde I but litel bettre" (X.42-4), before going on to deliver his unstintingly textual "myrie tale in prose." Thus the Parson echoes the *Prick* author on at least three points: his specific use of the rhyming phrases "make protestacioun" and "stonde to correccioun" to indicate his openness to censure before a more expertly "textueel"

[30] Thomas H. Bestul argues that the Parson deliberately "shifts the didactic treatise" of his source "in the direction of a private meditation" ("Chaucer's Parson's Tale" 606), and that he is surprisingly "up to date" with contemporary devotional trends (618), but he does not explore the potential relationship with the *Prick of Conscience*.

class of clerks, his insistence on focusing on the "sentence" of what he has to say, and his self-conscious failure to versify.

In short, when the Parson rhymes, he rhymes like the *Prick of Conscience*. This may signal a deliberate engagement with the *Prick*, and certainly signals one with the mix of late medieval devotional and catechetical genres it exemplifies. The Parson's re-deployment of the *Prick*'s concluding tropes to preface his own treatise shows him making subtle, playful adjustments to the traditional forms of devotional address; his suggestion that he will tell a "myrie" tale, and his protesting that he is not "textueel" just before he delivers a treatise that is patently unimaginable as an artifact of oral transmission—or, still more striking, his claim that he cannot rhyme just as he completes a five-beat rhyming couplet—suggest that with the *Parson's Tale* we enter the realm of deliberate paradox, of being asked to find the merriness in the scrupulous anatomization of sin, and even the actual un-textuality of such an apparently textual subjectivity as the penitential manuals the Parson translates would seem, by their form, to want to structure. As Lee Patterson has argued, "the *Parson's Tale* begins with the fictional construct but becomes the tale to end all tales, and its conclusion inevitably escapes from the narrative frame and now refers to the larger context of biography. The tale becomes not simply the last element of a sustained poetic enterprise but a crucial and even decisive piece of evidence about the moral worth of Chaucer himself" ("The 'Parson's Tale'" 380). Itself a "meditacioun" that will "stonde to correccioun," the *Prick of Conscience*'s also self-mislabeled "tretice" is reimagined by Chaucer as also a "myrie tale in prose," structuring an over-textual subjectivity that—unlike the *Prick of Conscience* itself—is playfully aware of itself as such. With his "Retractions," Chaucer willfully implicates himself in this paradox.

These are the most direct points of contact between the Parson's Prologue and the *Prick of Conscience*, but the overlap between the *Prick* and the *Parson's Tale* in terms of a mixed Bernardine and Pseudo-Bernardine spirituality is much more pervasive. A closer look at this particular form of correspondence can help us to better understand the distinctive theological preoccupations of both the Parson and the Parson's author, and to see how the Bernardine tradition transforms in its Middle English adaptation. The Parson's explicit use of Bernard himself can be separated out into three broad categories, based on the three major divisions of the *Parson's Tale*: the lengthy treatment of penance and contrition with which the tale begins, which refers directly to Bernard more than to any other non-scriptural authority;[31] the treatment of confession and catalogue of the sins, where Bernard appears directly only with reference to *acedia*, twice; and the concluding summary on the topics of satisfaction and the Kingdom of Heaven, where Bernard is not directly cited but where the problems of dualism and despair raised by the *Meditationes* and in Bernard's genuine work are nonetheless decisive.

Unlike in the *Prick of Conscience*, the Bernard of the *Parson's Tale* does much more than warn the reader of the threat of judgment day and the vileness of the body. The Parson's Bernard also addresses the genuinely Bernardine themes of contrition, passion meditation, and the danger of despair—discussed by the Parson in terms of *acedia*—in particular. Although I do not argue for a specifically Bernardine Chaucer, the influence of the probably Cistercian sermon *De Maria Magdalena* that Chaucer claims to have translated early in his career (Gross 3),[32] of Dante's figure of Bernard as it appears in Chaucer's two translations of the *Paradiso*'s Bernardine

[31] Bernard is cited five times; Augustine is cited four times, and paraphrased twice; Gregory is cited three times, and Jerome is cited twice.

[32] In the *Legend of Good Women*, Alceste says that Chaucer "made also, goon ys a gret while, / Origenes upon the Maudeleyne" (F.427-8). This translation project has been persuasively identified with the Pseudo-Origen's homily *De Maria Magdalena*, which was occasionally attributed to Bernard (McCall 491).

soliloquy, and even possibly of the most popular genuine Bernardine treatise of Chaucer's era in England, the *De diligendo deo*, do seem to me to have played a decisive role in shaping his theological and poetical imagination.[33] Attention to the figure of Bernard in Chaucer will therefore help us to see how *The Canterbury Tales* works, through this figure but also through many other devices, to open itself up to a profoundly anagogical perspective, distinctly at odds with the implicit dualism of the *Meditationes piissimae* and, to an extent, the *Prick of Conscience*.

The Parson's references to Bernard in his tale's opening section on contrition are conventional, but more generously and eclectically selected than those of the *Prick of Conscience*. First, a passage from Nicholas of Clairvaux is attributed to Bernard, to the effect that contrition must be "hevy and grevous, and ful sharp and poynaunt in herte" if it is to be effective (X.130). The Pseudo-Bernardine *Sermo ad prelatos in concilio* is then deployed, also in Bernard's voice, to warn the reader that on judgment day "we shullen yeven rekenynge of everich ydel word," for "alle oure werkes shullen openly be knowe" (X.165-6). Next, in this first section's latter half, Bernard is cited three times in quick succession: first, with reference to an unidentified source that was also used by the *Prick of Conscience* poet, to warn again that on judgment day "ther shal nat perisse an heer of his heed, ne a moment of an houre ne shal nat perisse of his tyme, that he ne shal yeve of it a rekenyng"; therefore, since the "grace of the Hooly Goost fareth lyk fyr, that may nat been ydel" (X.250-4), we must not wait until then to be contrite. The passage's second reference to Bernard makes use of the genuinely Bernardine *Sermo in quarta feria hebdomadae sanctae*, also known as *De passione domini*—or, in the

[33] It would also be interesting, though I do not have the space to do so here, to take a closer look at the influence of the work of the Cistercian Guillaume de Deguileville, whose *Le pèlerinage de la vie humaine* is the source of Chaucer's "ABC" to the Virgin.

Peterhouse MS, *Bernardus de cruce*—and reproduces the popular figure of Bernard as an expert meditator on the passion of Christ and Christ's humanity in general:[34] "Whil that I lyve I shal have reembrance of the travailles that oure Lord Crist suffred in prechyng" (X.256). This citation, not present in Pennaforte, raises the interesting possibility that Chaucer may have interpolated at least one Bernardine citation himself. The third reference is to an unidentified source, and depicts Bernard as responding to this passion meditation with the exclamation, "Accursed be the bitternesse of my synne, for which ther moste be suffred so muchel bitternesse" (X.274). In these passages, then, unlike in the *Prick of Conscience*, Bernard offers not just an authority figure to be heeded, but a model of contrition and contemplation that is to be directly imitated by the Parson's audience.[35]

In the long second section of the Parson's "myrie tale," Bernard is cited explicitly only in the Parson's treatment of *acedia*—which, despite its not being one of the longer treatments of the sins, deserves more attention as a central section of the *Parson's Tale* and an interpretive key to the whole *Canterbury Tales*.[36] In this section, a passage from William of St. Thierry's massively

[34] This Bernard dominates whole sections of Nicholas Love's popular early fifteenth-century *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, due to the widespread influence of the twentieth of Bernard's *Sermons on the Song of Songs* and of William of St. Thierry's *Golden Epistle* (Sargent x-xi). Bestul observes that Bernard's "great contribution" to "devotion to the Passion of Christ" was "his unremitting zeal for affective meditation on the Passion . . . as a way toward spiritual perfection" (*Texts of the Passion* 38).

[35] There is a long tradition of Bernard's playing this role in Latin and in the English vernacular. The Vernon MS's "Lamentacioun þat was bytwene vre lady and seynt Bernard," for example—itself a translation of a Latin source—sees the crucifixion through the eyes of Mary, but only as her experience is relayed through the contemplative prism of Bernard's attentive listening (Horstmann 297-328). This could be compared with the mediating role Mary plays in the prologues to the Prioress's and Second Nun's tales, the second of which refers explicitly to Bernard.

[36] David E. Berndt argues that monastic *acedia* informs Chaucer's characterization of the Monk and his tale: "Having defiantly cut himself from all . . . traditionally recommended remedies [for *acedia*], daun Piers will probably not overcome the spiritual disease which the Parson likens to an inferno. . . .The final tragedy is that if the Monk cannot overcome his spiritual listlessness, then the end result will be despair" (449). Thus the "worldly, seemingly jovial Monk of the *General Prologue*" and the "somber, somewhat pedantic narrator of the *Monk's Tale*" (435) might be aptly characterized in terms of the vicious dialectic of presumption and despair, which the section on *acedia* comes closest to diagnosing. This insight should be pushed further: from *The Book of the Duchess* on to the Pardoner's own "confession of despair" (Patterson, "The Subject of Confession" 170), Chaucer interrogates the state of listlessness that is described, by the narrator of the *Duchess*, in terms of having "felyng in nothyng": "melancolye / And drede I have for to dye. / . . . / I have lost al lustyhede. / Suche fantasies ben in myn hede / So I not what is best to doo" (11-29).

popular *Golden Epistle*, mis-attributed to Bernard for centuries, is used to assure the reader, "as seith Seint Bernard," that labor makes a man strong but "slouthe maketh hem feble and tendre" (X.690); a little later on, Bernard's fifty-fourth sermon on the *Song of Songs* enters the Middle English vernacular when, as the Parson describes the slow descent of the soul into the listlessness of *acedia*, he warns that "Thanne comth undevocioun, thurgh which a man is so blent, as seith Seint Bernard, and hath swich langour in soule that he may neither rede ne singe in hooly chirche, ne heere ne thynke of no devocioun, ne travaille with his handes in no good werk, that it nys hym unsavory and al apalled" (X.723). At this point, several other vices enter in: the slothful soul "soone wol be wrooth, and soone is enclyned to hate and to envye. Thanne comth the synne of worldly sorwe, swich as is cleped *tristicia*, that sleeth man. . . .For certes, swich sorwe werketh to the deeth of the soule and of the body also; for therof comth that a man is anoyed of his owene lif. Wherfore swich sorwe shorteth ful ofte the lif of man, er that his tyme be come by wey of kynde" (X.724-7).[37] In this middle section of the *Parson's Tale*, Bernard appears as an expert diagnostician of the descent into despair, and of the way both soul and body can become implicated in the time-collapsing crisis of being unable to trust in God's mercy. It is a role he more than earned in his writings, and almost the opposite of the one he plays in the *Prick of Conscience*: the saint reminds us where "wanhope, that is despeir of the mercy of God, that comth . . . somtyme of to muche drede," can lead us (X.693).[38]

[37] The Parson calls "ydelnesse" the "yate of alle harmes" (X.714). Along similar lines, Siegfried Wenzel observes that for Hugh of St. Victor *acedia* acts as a kind of hinge vice: once the soul has been weakened by the more spiritual vices of pride, envy, and wrath, *acedia* prepares it for the dull pursuit of worldly goods through the more fleshly vices of avarice, gluttony, and lust (39-40). Having mispositioned itself spiritually with respect to God (pride), others (envy), and the self (wrath), the soul affected by *acedia* is simply too weary now to resist the lures of riches, food and drink, and sexual pleasure.

[38] As Siegfried Wenzel points out, "Since the continuity of *acedia* was assured by the connection of Cassian's teaching with monasticism . . . until about 1200 *acedia* . . . remained primarily a monastic vice, that is, one which attacked chiefly religious who devoted themselves to the contemplative life" (35). The decisive role that the language of *acedia* plays in *The Parson's Tale*, and in Chaucer's work in general, is all the more striking because it

This Bernardine theme in turn becomes the central focus of the *Parson's Tale*'s, and so of the whole *Canterbury Tales*', conclusion. According to the Parson in the conclusion to his tale's brief third section, there are finally only four things that really "destourben penaunce": "drede, shame, hope, and wanhope, that is desperacion" (X.1057). In the first case, one is afraid that one "may suffre no penaunce" (X.1058); in the second, ashamed to go to confession; in the third, hopeful for riches in this world and a delayed deathbed confession, due to "surquidrie that he hath in Cristes mercy" (X.1067); and, in the fourth, in a state of desperation concerning "the mercy of Crist" or one's own perceived inability to "persevere in goodnesse" (X.1070). For all four of these disturbances—arguably all shades of *acedia*—the Parson's recommended solution is a combination of contemplation of the anagogical *futura*—the pain of hell will be far worse than bodily penance, the shame of doomsday worse than the shame of confession, and the "perpetueel wil to do synne" will soon be rewarded with "perpetueel peyne" (X.1069)—and of the *invisibilia*, since God is already aware of all our thoughts and Christ's mercy is always with us, as "the passion of Jhesu Crist is moore strong for to unbynde than synne is strong for to bynde" (X.1072). The repentant sinner, the Parson reminds his listener, "shal han strengthe of the help of God, and of al hooly chirche, and of the protecciouN of aungels, if hym list" (X.1075). Perhaps mistakenly—perhaps not—he even forgets to address the problem of "surquidrie," or over-confidence, in Christ's mercy; the two anagogical aspects, then, are kept in equal balance, *futura* and *invisibilia*, and there is if anything a slight tendency to stress mercy over judgment, love over—in the Bernardine schema—fear.

The Parson rounds from here into his rousing conclusion on the Kingdom of God:

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begins its career as a specifically monastic vice, tied to the idea of the "noonday devil" and the threat of renouncing the monastic commitment to stability.

> Thanne shal men understonde what is the fruyt of penaunce; and, after the word of Jhesu Crist, it is the endelees blisse of hevene, ther joye hath no contrarioustee of wo ne grevaunce . . . ther as the body of man, that whilhom was foul and derk, is moore cleer than the sonne; ther as the body, that whilom was syk, freele, and fieble, and mortal, is inmortal. . . .This blisful regne may men purchace by poverte espiritueel, and the glorie by lowenesse, the plentee of joye by hunger and thurst, and the reste by travaille, and the lyf by deeth and mortificacion of synne. (X.1076-80)

As the *Riverside Chaucer* notes, this passage on the "fruyt of penaunce" is not present in the primary source for the Parson's conclusion in Raymond of Pennaforte's *Summa* (965). It is a common theme, and one for which Chaucer may have had any number of sources; but it appears with a special relevance in a passage from Bernard's *De diligendo deo*, the *Meditationes*' "only rival" for popularity among treatises attributed to Bernard in late thirteenth century England on (Bestul, "Devotional Writing" 23). Like the conclusion to the *Parson's Tale*, this passage firmly links the "fruit of penance" to the theme of the glorified body:

> No wonder if the body seems now to bestow glory on the spirit, since it was of no little use to it even when it was infirm and mortal. . . .The body helps the soul to love God when it is weak, when it is dead, and when it is resurrected; first, to the fruit of penitence; second, to peace; and lastly, to consummation. Rightly the soul does not wish to be perfected without it, for it perceives deeply that the body has served it well in every state. ("Nec mirum si corpus iam gloriae conferre videtur spiritui, quod et infirmum et mortale constat ipsi non mediocriter valuisse. . . .Valet Deum diligenti animae corpus suum infirmum, valet et mortuum, valet et resuscitatum: primo quidem ad fructum paenitentiae,

secundo ad requiem, postremo ad consummationem. Merito sine illo perfici non vult, quod in omni statu in bonum sibi subservire persentit.") (XI.30; III:145)

Chaucer's evident taste in Bernardiana suggests that it is unlikely he missed the most popular genuinely Bernardine treatise of his time;[39] in any case, the two authors distinctly overlap in offering a counter-vision to both the *Meditationes piissimae*'s and the *Prick of Conscience*'s tendency to denigrate the body and to despair of all things earthly. The Parson's final paragraph offers a much more authentically Bernardine vision: heaven as a place—or better, as the Parson puts it, as itself a "parfit glorious pilgrymage / That highte Jerusalem celestial" (X.50-1)—"ther as the body" is glorified and not simply discarded, anagogically recouped as one of the "fruyts of penaunce" that make it possible to achieve what Bernard calls the "fruit of penitence" here on earth. For all the Parson's apparent sympathy with the *Prick of Conscience* author's *contemptus mundi* themes, here at the end of the *Parson's Tale*, where the whole kaleidoscopic treatment of the sins and of their remedies is telescoped down to the problem of the despair of God's mercy, it is a vision of the glorified body that is the Parson's final recommended remedy for despair.[40]

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[39] As I detail above, I refer to not only to the many citations of Bernard in the *Parson's Tale*, but also to the two translations of Bernard's hymn to the Virgin from Dante's *Paradiso*, and to the lost translation of the *De Maria Magdalena*, which was "in almost every case . . . found with works by (or ascribed to) Bernard of Clairvaux" (McCall 494). There is also the playful idiomatic expression, from which I draw my chapter title, near the beginning of Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*.

[40] Bernard is himself at times ambivalent about the body; however, in his earliest treatise—*On Grace and Free Will*—he celebrates the way the Incarnation reconciles the body and soul with the world's more formal perfection: "That very form came, therefore, to which free choice was to be conformed, because in order that it might regain its original form, it had to be reformed from that out of which it had been formed. Now, wisdom is the form and conformation means that the image fulfills in the body what form does in the world" "Venit ergo ipsa forma, cui conformandum erat liberum arbitrium, quia ut pristinam reciperet formam, ex illa erat reformandum, ex qua fuerat et formatum. Forma autem, sapientia est, conformatio, ut faciat imago in corpore, quod forma facit in orbe") (X.33; III:189). A passage from the sixth sermon on the *Song of Songs* sets the two strands in Bernard's thinking on the body alongside one another: "How sad indeed that men should degrade and exchange the one who was their glory for the image of a grass-eating ox. But God had mercy on their errors. . . .He became incarnate for the sake of carnal men, that he might induce them to relish the life of the Spirit. In the flesh and through the flesh he performed works of which not man but God was the author. . . .In the flesh, I repeat, and through the flesh, he powerfully and openly performed wonderful deeds" ("Heu! sic homines perdiderunt et commutaverunt gloriam suam in similitudinem vituli comedentis fenum! Quorum Deus miseratus errores. . . .Obtulit carnem sapientibus carnem, per quam discerent sapere et spiritum. Nam dum in carne et per carnem facit opera non carnis, sed Dei. . . .In carne, inquam, et per carnem potenter ac patenter operatus mira") (6.3; I:27). A tendency to rankle at the "grass-eating ox" of the body

In fact, the Parson's final point of emphasis is echoed throughout the *Canterbury Tales*, and is more essential than has been realized to the *Tales*' deliberate, artfully developed theological program. The focal figure of this endeavor is the Host himself, whose possibly Eucharistic connotations have been noted by Nicholas Watson ("Christian Ideologies" 79), but who has to my knowledge never been thoroughly interpreted in this way. In what remains of this chapter, I will argue that Harry Bailey, the Host—the figure in the poem who most consistently expresses himself in language that refers directly to the body, and who leads the *Tales*' own "glorious pilgrymage"—is Chaucer's pattern for an anagogically inflected selfhood, the interpretive center of the *Canterbury Tales*, and the cornerstone of a Chaucerian incarnational theology. It is in the figure of the Host that Chaucer concentrates his attempt to do justice to the neglected themes of the anagogical *invisibilia*, where eternity is seen as always already interpenetrating time, and of the Incarnation, where the eternal Son Himself is literally present in time and in the body. Although the Host is the most "literal"-minded of the pilgrims,[41] once he has set the tale-telling game in motion he in fact acts as a kind of transformer through which all the tale-tellers' efforts run—passing "juggement" on them, as he puts it (I.805)—and offering nuanced interpretive commentaries on the pilgrims' stories precisely when he appears to be responding with the most reflexive artlessness. In this respect, the Chaucer pilgrim himself might

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often exists side by side in Bernard's writing with a strong sense of the Incarnation's having sanctified all the particulars of bodily existence. In Chapter One, I cited Kristeva's definition of Bernardine love as "this passion of the body wrenching itself" (166), and Étienne Gilson's claim that Bernardine spirituality centers itself first on the "primary necessity" of the "needs of the body" (39). Another way to put this would be to say that for Bernard the body cannot be understood except through the lens of salvation history: it is both the most pitiful, needy part of our created nature and, as such, also the most dramatic testament to Christ's capacity to glorify.

[41] Richard Utz identifies a "literalistic attitude throughout Chaucer's poetry," which he associates with the teachings of John Wyclif and with a "tendency to point to the chasm between the primary meanings of words and their figurative, metaphorical, or allegorical implications" (168). This seems to me to miss the point of Chaucerian literalism. The Host both takes things at face value and takes advantage of the way meanings are always playfully shifting; as Chaucer repeatedly alleged, the best jokes are both funny and true. For the Host, the "chasm" between words and meanings is first of all an opportunity for play.

be seen as a kind of literary-critical red herring; he has drawn much of the scholarly debate around the question of apparent naivete and implied irony to himself,[42] deflecting attention away from the more garrulous, still more obtuse-seeming Host—who actually, somewhat like Langland's Nede, represents the interpretive principle on which the whole poem depends.

Chaucer's sacrificial Host

The first sign of the Host's suppressed centrality lies in the rich associations of the word "Hoost" itself. The Middle English noun brings with it a host of ambiguities: according to the Middle English Dictionary's third entry, "host(e)" means not only "one who entertains guests" (1a) and "the landlord of an inn or lodging house" (1b), but also the opposite: "an invited guest, a guest at a feast or other meal; a stranger or a traveller entertained in one's home" (2a). A little further afield, the MED's fourth listing confirms that "host(e)" may also mean "the bread consecrated in the Eucharist" (2), deriving from the broader sense of "an animal offered for sacrifice, a sacrificial victim; also, any sacrificial offering, a sacrifice" (1a) and, more figuratively, "a spiritual sacrifice; one's life or body; Christ" (1b).[43] Additional shades of meaning are supplied by the word's first and third MED listings: first and most frequently, "hoste" as "an army" (1a) or "a body of attendants or followers" (2a), often used to indicate an armed or angelic congregation; and thirdly, "hoste" as the name of "a place of lodging and

[42] Leicester, for instance, assumes the Host has "missed the point of the Pardoner's self-presentation": "His brutal literalism cuts through the tissue of spiritual allusion and moral self-dramatization in the Pardoner's final speech, reducing the Pardoner, his relics, and his 'coillons,' if has them, to mere matter, and matter that is not even blasphemous, only insulting. The Host's explosion begins to restore a perspective that has been largely lost in the course of the tale's development when the Pardoner's voice is the only one before us—the perspective of the ordinary world" (58). But what if this were the point?

[43] This association would likely have been strengthened by the Canon for Mass as recorded in the Sarum Missal, which repeats the word "hostia" three times in the Oblation: "Hostiam puram, hostiam sanctam, hostiam immaculatam" (Maskell 98). As the MED entry makes clear, the Middle English equivalent "hoste" was already used in this sense in Wyclif's time.

entertainment" itself. Taken together, these wide-ranging definitions make it clear just what a precisely overcharged selection the word "Hoost" for the *Tales*' master of ceremonies was: the word means a host but also a guest; the keeper of an inn but also the inn itself; a single person but also a group of soldiers or angels; an animal sacrifice that is also Christ; and, through its connection to the Eucharist, food that is also God. These interlocking layers of paradox make Harry Bailey the ideal anagogical figure: a surface that is also a depth, a "literal" sense recharged with eternal significance, at once one and many— the Host represents and manifests a meaning-drenched incarnational theology that gives the whole vivid tale-telling competition its distinctively polyvalent playfulness. They also suggest, against the prevailing critical consensus,[44] that Chaucer was not just interested in theological ideas, but was deliberately developing a wholly original, remarkably strange theological project at the center of his most celebrated work. This project is aptly summarized in the Parson's rousing panegyric on the glorified body, but it deserves further teasing out in terms of the way it functions in the *Tales* more generally, and in the figure of the Host in particular.

Once the polyvalence of the word "hoste" is noticed, it seems hard to deny that Chaucer consciously plays with at least some of its multiple layers of meaning. In just the second line of his appearance in the General Prologue, Harry Bailey "to the soper sette . . . us anon," and "Strong was the wyn" (I.748-50). A "semely" (I.751), "large" (I.753), "myrie" (I.757) man, the Host "pleyen . . . bigan" (I.758) after supper, as if the pilgrims' act of sharing this meal had awakened him—the body of Christ, so to speak, has come alive among them—and announces,

[44] For instance, Eleanor Johnson suggests that *The Canterbury Tales* "does not have a unified didactic goal or message that emerges for a reader gradually and progressively as he or she approaches the end of the work," leaving its readers "walking among ethical penumbras" (*Practicing Literary Theory* 26). As I will argue, the Host is anything but a penumbra, and in my view he himself represents the "goal" of the whole work. I strongly agree, however, that this is more a matter of "*how and whether*" than of "*what* particular lesson a narrator might learn from a literary work." The Host models a "how," an approach, not the sort of doctrinal and ethical lessons that are blithely dispensed by the *Prick of Conscience*.

"Fayn wolde I doon yow myrthe, wiste I how" (I.766). The Host then uses the key term "quite" for the first time in the poem: "Ye goon to Caunterbury—God yow speede, / The blisful martir quite yow youre meede!" (I.769-70), and adds, "Now, by my fader soule that is deed, / But ye be myrie, I wol yeve yow myn heed" (I.781-2). This immediately activates the word's sacrificial meaning: the Host quite over-graphically promises that his game will make the pilgrims merry, or he will sacrifice himself for them. This suggests in turn a deeper activation of the end of the General Prologue as a kind of re-imagined Creation and Incarnation narrative, in its own way as original as Julian of Norwich's famous collapsing down of the moments of Adam's fall and Christ's birth:[45] the Host designs a game for sheer pleasure—for which purpose the pilgrims are given the opportunity and even, one might figuratively imagine, the capacity to speak, since "confort ne myrthe is noon / To ride by the weye doumb as a stoon" (I.773-4)—and the winner "Shal have a soper at oure aller cost" (I.799); that is, the pilgrim whose tale is "of best sentence and moost solaas" (I.768) will be the beneficiary of the promised act of sacrifice.[46] Entering among the pilgrims as their equal, and giving up something of his own to do so—the Host promises, "And for to make yow the moore mury, / I wol myselven goodly with yow ryde, / Right at myn owene cost, and be youre gyde"[47]—the Host nonetheless retains his right to be their judge: "And whoso wole my juggement withseye / Shal paye al that we spenden by the weye" (I.802-6). Their "governour," "juge," and "reportour" (I.813-4), who nonetheless "of manhod . . .

[45] Julian collapses the two pivotal moments in salvation history down into the single act of God's sending out His servant to retrieve something for Him (273-5). As I will discuss in my Conclusion, this has parallels with the way the Annunciation has sometimes been imagined as happening on the date of both the Crucifixion and the Creation of the world. The *Golden Legend*, for instance, makes this association (Vol. 3, 100).

[46] The fact that there is no clear indication of who is winning or losing the game at any point perhaps supports the broad arc of Nicholas Watson's article "Visions of Inclusion: Universal Salvation and Vernacular Theology in Pre-Reformation England," which argues that universal salvation was more thinkable in the late Middle Ages than we tend to imagine. Even the Pardoner is not excluded from the company of pilgrims. On the other hand, the Canon excludes himself.

[47] See Philippians 2.6-8.

lakkede right naught" (I.756), Harry Bailey will "sette a soper at a certeyn pris" (I.815); waking the pilgrims up the next morning as their "aller cok"—another traditional symbol for Christ[48]—he "gadrede us togidre alle in a flok" (I.823-4). The symbolic significance here is almost too obvious to see; the Host speaks so loudly—he is, after all, "Boold of his speche" (I.755)—that the Christological commonplaces act as a kind of background noise, too ubiquitous and almost obtusely literalistic to have provoked much critical interest. Chaucer has him administering wine, setting a sacrificial meal at a certain price, gathering his flock as their judge, and entering into the game he himself has made in a sacrificial act of merry-making; and yet the Host's cover as rowdy man of the flesh—"Harry Bailey" itself might be translated, with some allowances, as "fleshly seneschal"—is so vividly drawn as to render all this almost invisible.

The symbolic patterns established in the General Prologue recur consistently throughout the first fragment of the *Tales*. It is a critical commonplace to suggest that the Host keeps subtle control of the "quiting" game, from his possibly rigged provision that the Knight should go first—"Were it by aventure, or sort, or cas" (I.844)—to his giving the game its distinctive shape with his recommendation that the Miller, who is said to speak "in Pilates voys" (I.3124), should "Somwhat… quite with the Knyghtes tale" (I.3119), to his first real confrontation, with the Cook, over the question of whether "A man may seye ful sooth in game and pley" (I.4354). The Cook responds, "sooth play, quaad pley," and threatens, "therfore, Herry Bailly, by thy feith, / Be thou nat wrooth, er we departen heer, / . . . / But er we parte, ywis, thou shalt be quit" (I.4357-62). The first time the Host's authority is outright challenged in the poem, then, the Cook makes a threat that might be construed as violent or, so to speak, proto-sacrificial, at the same time as he

[48] Pope Gregory I is supposed to have declared the rooster the "emblem of Christianity," beginning its widespread use as a weathervane atop church steeples (Hore 202). In Gregory's well-known *Moralia in Iob*, the cock is compared with preachers, who "awaken the sluggish" and adjust their message according to the relative understanding of their listeners (Birth 134). Both associations seem relevant here.

seeks to disengage truth from playfulness[49]—one of the key intersections around which the Host's paradoxical and incarnational identity is constructed—and the first time the Host is challenged at all, the Miller is said to sound oddly like Pilate. The first fragment of *The Canterbury Tales* therefore reinforces the Host's role as judge and "governour" in the broadest sense, but it also represents him as threatened by the other fate of the "hoste," in the meaning derived from the Latin word *hostia*: the stranger or foreigner who is also a sacrifice. As we will see, this is a role Chaucer depicts the Host as deliberately playing: drawing the pilgrims' sacrificial energy to himself, he manages to keep the pilgrimage and storytelling game going, without ever allowing its constant "quiting" tension to break out into real violence.

Other fragments of the *Tales* expand on the Christological significance of the Host, while at the same time widening out its meaning to encompass themes of timeliness, embodiment, and a dynamic peace that is sustained by means of constant creative tension.[50] The "wordes of the Hoost to the compaignye" with which the Man of Law's tale is prefaced offer a wistful meditation on time's un-recoverability, which is oddly but characteristically tied to the irreducible particulars of the body: "'But los of tyme shendeth us,' quod [the Host]. / It wol nat come agayn, withouten drede, / Namoore than wole Malkynes maydenhede, / Whan she hath lost it in hir wantownesse. / Lat us nat mowlen thus in ydelnesse" (II.28-32). Later on, the Host calls for peace—"Pees, namoore of this!" (III.1298)—between the Summoner and the Friar (III.1279), corrects the diffident Clerk's un-incarnational attachment to "sophyme" (IV.5) and study,

[49] We may even be meant to remember Pilate's question to Jesus, "quid est veritas?" ("What is truth?") (John 18.38). The Cook apologizes for telling a tale "of an hostileer," (I.4360), which is the word used for the innkeeper in the parable of the good Samaritan in the Wycliffite Bible—another association that may be relevant here.
[50] My reading overlaps somewhat with Barbara Page's article "Concerning the Host," which ties the Host to "themes of time and destiny" (1) and argues that he is "a time-bound and earth-bound man" who "represents the immediate present" (11), "an expansive man whose thought and action are constricted by thought time and the immediate physical locale" (12): "He is always expansive and—intellectually, at least—ungovernable" (10). But I believe Page misses the incarnational intentions behind this "expansive," "ungovernable," and yet time-bound presence.

opining that "what man that is entred in a pley, / He nedes moot unto the pley assente" (IV.10-1), and describes the Monk's many tragedies as "nat worth a boterflye, / For therinne is ther no desport ne game" (VII.2790-1). He also asks the Merchant to tell them a tale of marriage, "Syn ye so muchel knowen of that art" (IV.1241), and the Squire to "sey somwhat of love," because he must "Konnen theron as muche as any man" (V.2-3), demonstrating a preference throughout for personal experience, the body, and above all for sheer playfulness; his "pees" is characterized by a "quiting" tension that he encourages even as he redirects it when it threatens to boil over. The notable exception to this is peace-making function is the Pardoner, whose own, aggressively monetized literalism culminates in his request that the pilgrims "Unbokele" their "purs" and pay him for his pseudo-relics (VI.945), and who prompts Harry Bailey to exclaim, with his distinctive mix of literalistic piety and foul-mouthed fleshiness, "by the croys which that Seint Eleyne fond, / I wolde I hadde thy coillons in myn hond / In stide of relikes or of seintuarie" (VI.951-3). Like Judas and Christ, the Pardoner and the Host eventually kiss; but the Host's otherwise often naïve-seeming reactions to the other pilgrims' self-representations lend an unconventional moral to this story: of all the pilgrims, even the Monk, the Host finds the Pardoner's practiced money-making act to be the most unforgivably mirthless.[51] The Pardoner is specifically asked to tell a "myrie tale" (VI.316), and his multi-layered refusal to do so is the greatest direct defiance of the Host that we witness in the *Tales*.[52]

Still more strictly allegorical and even doctrinal language accumulates around the figure of Harry Bailey, and points up a Chaucerian meditation on violence and peace that is conducted in and through the figure of the Host. Harry's fraught relationship with his wife is one such

[51] It is striking that the Host is associated with Bacchus, the god of wine and merrymaking—"O Bacus, yblessed be thy name, / That so kanst turnen ernest into game!" (IX.99-100)—just before the Manciple tells a story of Apollo's jealousy. If the Host is Chaucer's Christian God, he is also in an important sense Dionysian.
[52] It is worth pointing out that this is the same thing the Parson promises and—so far as we know—delivers.

overcharged area for inquiry: he reacts to the Clerk's tale of Griselda with the perhaps deliberately over-enthusiastic, "By Goddes bones, / Me were levere than a barel ale / My wyf at hoom had herd this legende ones! / . . . / As to my purpos, wiste ye my wille; / But thyng that wol nat be, lat it be stille" (IV.1212b-g). He expands on this reaction when he exclaims at the conclusion of Chaucer's Tale of Melibee, "I hadde levere than a barel ale / That Goodelief, my wyf, hadde herd this tale! / For she nys no thyng of swich pacience" (VII.1893-5); instead, we are told, Goodelief encourages Harry to beat his servants more severely, and asks him to take revenge on whoever slights her socially in church. "I woot wel that she wol do me slee som day / Som neighebor" (VII.1917-8), the Host worries, anticipating that this wife will eventually push him to use his strength—"For I am perilous with knyf in honde" (VII.1919)—to do evil, and suggesting that he is more than a little scared of her himself. It is also suggestive, in connection with this, that the wife of the historical Harry Bailey's name was Christian (*Riverside* 928); if Harry is taken for a figure for Christ, then Chaucer may be offering here a comic play on the allegory of Christ and the Church as the Bridegroom and the Bride. "Goodelief" the Christian, named after a Flemish saint known for her patience, is—unlike Harry Bailey—not at all simply what she is named; in fact, she is the polar opposite, an impatiently violent woman who ensures that her husband gets no rest, much less a good life of his own. The Bride of Christ, in this allegorical reading, is constantly egging the Body of Christ on to violence, and pharisaically construing the perceived faults of others as causes for divine punishment; she is the bride, not as finally redeemed and "quiting" only in the sense that martyrs "quite," but as sinfully manifest in the sacrificial violence of earth. Harry is worried, in essence, that she will send him on crusade.

In addition to this potentially allegorical aspect of these few details of Harry's personal life, there is a more characteristically literalistic dimension to the way the language that accrues

around the figure of the Host tends to work. Harry's multiple uses of the word "mateere" (VII.1923, IX.102, X.28), and his oddly worded response to the dreary un-playfulness of the "Monk's Tale"—"For sikerly, nere clynkyng of youre belles / . . . / I sholde er this han fallen doun for sleep, / . . . / And wel I woot the substance is in me, / If any thyng shal wel reported be" (VII.2794-804)—suggest a careful manipulation of his language toward punning around the key terms of Eucharistic theology: the host is God in "mateere," the "substance" of Christ's body with all the accidents of bread. Even the very first word used to describe the Host—"A semely man OURE HOOSTE was withalle" (I.751)—indicates a play on something like substance and accident, seeming and being; he is a man of surfaces, of meaning present in the material, substance in matter, a "seemly" man. The next two of the three lines in the General Prologue in which the word "Hoost" appears—"Up roos oure Hoost, and was oure aller cok" (I.823), and, "And there oure Hoost bigan his hors areste" (I.827)—also conspicuously associate the Host with animals, perhaps strengthening the secondary "sacrificial animal" meaning in the Middle English. This proclivity for animality is echoed in the Host's addresses to the two religious men he deems ripe for breeding: "Thou woldest han been a tredefowel aright / Haddestow as greet a leeve as thou has myght" (VII.1945-6), he says both to the Monk and to the Nun's Priest, the one before his tale and the other after. Of the Nun's Priest, the Host adds: "He loketh as a sperhauk with his yen" (VII.3457). These lines further illustrate the way Harry's mind works consistently in a series of analogical leaps, by which the "accidents" of figural language—here the "tredefowel"—do nothing to distract him from, and in fact seem only to make him savor more, the "substance" of its essential meaning—in this case, the religious men's virility.[53] The Host is

[53] Bernard in fact explicitly theorizes an incarnational approach to language in his sermon *De passione domini*, cited in Chaucer's *Parson's Tale* but not in his source in Pennaforte: "As a thought clothes itself in a physical sound without any diminution of itself, neither before nor after it is spoken, so the Son of God took flesh, suffering neither commixture nor diminution, neither before nor after taking flesh" ("Sicut autem cogitatio vestit sibi vocem

not only an incarnational figure; he also models a way of reading, so to speak, incarnationally, on the surfaces of things.

This last point suggests some of the upshot of reading the Host in the way I am suggesting we must. If the Host is a both serious and seriously playful figure for the incarnate God, he is also the figure in the *Tales* whose attitudes and opinions ought to be taken—provided we can catch onto the trick of deciding what he really means, without bowdlerizing the jokes—the most seriously. His odd way of framing his reflections on the monk's hypothetical potency—"God yeve me sorwe, but, and I were a pope, / Nat oonly thou, but every myghty man, / Though he were shorn ful hye upon his pan, / Sholde have a wyf; for al the world is lorn!" (VII.1950-3)—might represent, if taken as a serious ecclesiological recommendation from the "hairy bailiff" of God, a real program for reformation of the Church; moreover, taken this way, it even faintly suggests that the actual pope, like the actual Christians allegorized in the Host's wife "Goodelief," may not be acting exactly in step with the real, surprisingly playful "substance" of Christ's Eucharistic presence on earth. In fact, the Host himself implies that we should read him in something like this way, echoing one of his favorite phrases as he rounds off his long address to the monk: "But be nat wrooth, my lord, though that I pleye. / Ful ofte in game a sooth I have herd seye!" (VII.1963-4). It may not be wrong to characterize the Host's words as merely hazarded suggestions—he rides, as they all do, "To Caunterbury-ward" (I.793), and they do not arrive; there is a certain playful provisionality to the whole pilgrimage—but, as he says himself, this is not the same as saying there is no "sooth" in them. The Host's final words, which are addressed to the Parson just before he begins his "myrie tale in prose"—"Be what thou be, ne breke thou nat oure pley," he has just warned him (X.24)—restate his infatuation throughout

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corpoream absque sui diminutione vel ante vocem, vel post vocem, sic Filius Dei assumpsit carnem, non commixtionem passus nec diminutionem, nec ante carnem, nec post carnem") (13; V:65).

with all things potentially fruitful, whether they be tale-telling games or sadly celibate religious men, as if through him the Creator God's recommendation to "be fruitful and multiply" still echoed: "But hasteth yow; the sonne wole adoun; / Beth fructuous, and that in litel space, / And to do wel God sende yow his grace! / Sey what yow list, and we wol gladly heere" (X.70-3).[54] Taken together, the Host's three characteristic preoccupations—the continued playfulness of the tale-telling the game, even at risk of conflict; its corollary in the recommended fruitfulness of the whole company, especially where procreativity is concerned; and the crusading behavior of his violent wife, who needs to be set a better example—might constitute the three pillars of a serious reforming program,[55] which cannot be adequately summarized in my own "litel space"; but it can safely be said that the outlook the Host both prescribes and models is consistently anagogical in the sense of de Lubac's neglected *invisibilia*, where the eternal is recognized as manifest on the literal surfaces of personal experience and in the prosaic passing of time—in the body, in bodily love, and in the simple play of shared human creativity that characterizes the Host's tale-telling game.

"Straw for youre gentillesse!": A brief revision of Chaucerian subjectivity

If my reading of the Host is right, it indicates a serious critical blind spot. To conclude, I want to suggest exactly what this blind spot is, and how it might be corrected. To this end, I will briefly examine two landmark studies of *The Canterbury Tales*—Marshall Leicester's *Disenchanted Self* and Jill Mann's *Chaucer & Medieval Estates Satire*—and argue that the

[54] Bernard's sermon *De passione domini* begins, "Vigilate animo, fratres, ne infructuose pertranseant vos huius temporis sacramenta" ("Take care, brothers, that you not let the mysteries of this time fruitlessly pass you by") (1; V:56).

[55] John Bossy compares the Parson's understanding of sin with Dante's in terms of a "community ethics making more excuse for the sins of concupiscence than for those of aversion," such as pride, envy, and anger. According to Bossy, in Chaucer's time the "diseases of the spirit were more to be avoided than diseases of the flesh," because the "sins of aversion destroy community" (35).

insights of both must be radicalized, if a critical impasse around anagogical and incarnational language and subjectivity is to be overcome. But first I want to offer a more positive articulation of the anagogical reading of Chaucer I am recommending here. In a way, it is not so dissimilar from the reading I have offered of Langland in Chapter One: Chaucer is concerned with redirecting theological attention toward bodily existence and bodily needs, which are in turn linked, more so by Chaucer than by Langland, to human creativity and general fruitfulness, including the distinctively Chaucerian emphasis on the way nature "priketh hem . . . in hir corages" toward both pilgrimage in the world and procreativity (I.11). Near the very end of the *Parson's Tale*, Chaucer in fact added a passage on the works of mercy, with specific reference to the needs of the body, to the Parson's source: "Now been ther thre manere of almesse: contricion of herte . . . pitee of defaute of his neighebores; and the thridde is in yevynge of good conseil and comfort, goostly and bodily, where man han nede. . . .And tak kep that a man hath nede of thise thinges generally: he hath nede of foode, he hath nede of clothyng and herberwe, he hath nede of charitable conseil and visitynge in prisone and in maladie, and sepulture of his dede body" (X.1030-1). There is a meaningful distinction between Langland's more agonistic, individual journey of the will—which nonetheless begins with Holy Church's recommending that Will center his search for the truth on the barest bodily needs—and Chaucer's fraught but communal quiting game,[56] but Bernard's *De diligendo deo* treatise provides a good epigraph for an unwritten work on the incarnational, "nede"-based spirituality of both Chaucer and Langland alike: "For the need of the flesh is a certain language, and it brings back word of the kindnesses it has experienced. And so it will not be difficult for the one thus affected to keep the

[56] Ann Astell notes that, in contrast with Dante's quest for "imaginative, theological transcendence," Chaucer "takes an immanent route that dramatizes debate and rivalry, preserving *quaestiones* as *quaestiones* and using them as an avenue to a humble self-knowledge" (63).

commandment of loving one's neighbor. . . .This one loves chastely, and keeping the commandments is no burden to the chaste" ("Est enim carnis quaedam loquela necessitas, et beneficia quae experiendo probat, gestiendo renuntiat. Itaque sic affecto, iam de diligendo proximo implere mandatum non erit difficile. . . .Amat caste, et casto non gravatur oboedire mandato") (IX.26; III:141). Another passage might be adduced to capture the distinctively Chaucerian twist, which Langland even at his poem's end seems somewhat to resist: "Plainly the flesh is a good and faithful companion to the good spirit—which, if it weighs down, it aids; or if it does not aid, it unburdens; or certainly aids, and does not burden at all" ("Bonus plane fidusque comes caro spiritui bono, quae ipsum aut, si onerat, iuvat, aut, si non iuvat, exonerat, aut certe iuvat, et minime onerat") (XI.31; III:145). Chaucer's Host embodies his distinctive sensitivity, as does his Parson at the *Parson's Tale*'s end, to the sense in which the flesh remains a "good and faithful companion," even in the midst of the "hunger and thurst" that it experiences now (X.1080), whenever it is taken seriously as always gesturing toward the "parfit glorious pilgrymage / That highte Jerusalem celestial" (X.50-1). My long analysis above of the *Meditationes piissimae de cognitione humanae conditionis*, and of its adaptation in the *Prick of Conscience*, has I hope foregrounded some of the theological pressures that may have provoked this response, and made it easier to perceive that response's real originality. It has also perhaps made it possible at least to begin to see how Chaucer and Langland's different relationships to the Bernardine and Pseudo-Bernardine material may have helped determine their own different points of emphasis.

The specific quality of the critical un-noticing of this aspect of Chaucer's work, however, deserves another moment's consideration. Leicester's is the more nearly contemporary, and the more typically conditioned by deconstructive and psychoanalytical modes of reading. He is

aware of this; he protests that he is "neither deconstructing nor psychoanalyzing Chaucer's text," but instead sees "these discourses as descriptions, and to a degree as analogues, of Chaucerian practice. He uses them only as "part of an attempt to describe what the text of the *Canterbury Tales* depicts." The Pardoner, for instance, "is an active deconstructionist who deliberately mimes official discourses in such a way as to bring out their underlying contradictions" (16); that is, Leicester is not so much saying that Chaucer needs to be deconstructed, as that Chaucer himself deliberately gives voice to deconstructionist modes of reading within his text. In Leicester's reading, the Pardoner is the most "disenchanted" of the pilgrims—which codes roughly as "enlightened," or "good"—and therefore the one who most clearly sees "that what had been thought to be other-originated, the product of transcendent forces not directly susceptible of human tampering and subversion, is in fact humanly originated, the product of human creation. . . .In its extreme form [disenchantment] is the suspicion, or even the conviction, that the category of transcendence itself is a human construction and that there are only institutions" (26-7). But Leicester is so beholden to disenchanted ambiguity that he obscures the obvious point that the Pardoner is also one of the most manipulative and malign, incipiently sacrificial pilgrims in the whole *Canterbury Tales*; if everything is an institution, the Pardoner's canny despair starts to look like a commendable index of his refusal to be taken in. In line with his failure to notice the Host at all, Leicester makes nothing of the Pardoner's having to be reconciled to the Host with a kiss; Harry Bailey is, after all, a literalist simpleton, and the Pardoner rightly disenchanted of all that the Host admires. The effect is deeply symptomatic of the theological blind spots of such modes of literary criticism: the "fruyt" is thrown out with the "chaff," the playful Host is sacrificed in favor of the poem's most cynical villain, and meaning is thrown back on itself so that we, as Leicester says in his book's final words, may "keep reading"

(417). It is not noticed that it is institutionally beneficial for Leicester to say so. In this respect Leicester simply becomes the Pardoner: he sells his disenchanted wares; he betrays the Host with a kiss, and betrays the reader into believing that we must go on reading, for unclear professional reasons, with very little "sentence" and even less "solaas." Chaucer might have called this *The Critic's Tale*.

If Chaucer is critical of naive enchantment, he is at least as critical of smug disenchantment. A careful reading of the Host, and of his violently negative reactions to the Pardoner and to the Monk, makes this abundantly clear. Leicester is careful to advise that we "disengage" the Weberian idea of "disenchantment" from the "developmental-historical context of the rise of a scientific worldview that leads Weber to adopt the vocabulary of calculation and technics, in contrast to magic and religion" (26). This neatly brackets out his often brilliant reading of *The Canterbury Tales* from the broader context of the insights that led Weber to declare the disenchanted age one of "specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart" (182)—an abstraction that sits uneasily beside Leicester's frequent salutary recommendations that we stick with the literal sense of the text longer than more allegorical modes of reading would like. His recommendation that we view "subjectivity and its implications" in terms of "an understanding of the human fact of the self as that impossible thing, that insatiable desire, that ceaselessly escapes and returns," a more or less Bernardine idea in itself, leads him on to the impossibly un-Chaucerian conclusion that "'Chaucer' shares the Derridean desire to escape knowledge and certainty, to reach a point of not knowing any longer where he is going because of the constraints such 'knowledge' imposes" (413). Who knows where he is going better than the Host? Which work of literature has a more clearly defined destination than *The Canterbury Tales*? For Chaucer, unlike for Leicester, it is possible to have a destination without having yet

arrived there—the pilgrim's "sperandarum substantia rerum" ("substance of things hoped for") that is the biblical definition of faith (Hebrews 11.1). Despite his admirably careful attention to the way different Canterbury pilgrims betray whole implicit worldviews in the way they tell their tales—his reading of the knight's repressed nihilism is particularly insightful—Leicester misses the way, with the Pardoner, Chaucer deliberately depicts the pitfalls of a certain cynically anti-institutional, and yet at the same time deeply institutionalized, "disenchantment," which is not able or willing to admit that the categories of "transcendence" and "human construction" need not be mutually exclusive.

A more historically situated foundation for Leicester's instructively surface-oriented, incipiently anagogical mode of reading can be found in Mann's seminal *Chaucer & Medieval Estates Satire*, where Mann, like Leicester, has an essential insight into the *Tales* that nonetheless needs to be radicalized. Leicester is rightly critical of the way Mann brings "that institution [of estates classification] into the center of the poem" without "an attention to how the text *represents* the act of description and classification itself in the person of the narrator" (393), but he misses one crucial aspect of Mann's foregrounding of the estates satire aspect of the *Tales*—the relative conventionality of the General Prologue's listing of a cast of characters by their estate, and the relative originality of Chaucer's tendency to describe more than to moralize—that Mann herself consistently minimizes: her brilliant identification of the "omission of the victim" as a key mechanism that drives the "quiting" game of the *Tales*, as when "the social effects of [the pilgrims'] sometimes dubious practices are left out of account" (*Chaucer and Medieval Estates* 86). If this is taken, as Leicester would suggest it should be, as something that the *Tales* very deliberately represents, and set alongside my own reading of the Host, it becomes immediately clear that it must also be one of the interpretive cruxes of the whole work:

the Host—the *hostia*, literally "sacrifice"—himself is the great omitted victim of *The Canterbury Tales*, the sacrificial body of Christ who puts himself at risk of conflict not only with the Pardoner, but with the Miller, and the Cook, and the Manciple, and even the mysterious Canon near the *Tales*' end. Mann is right that this omission mechanism is "part of the *Prologue*'s peculiar social ethic, which extends even to the pilgrims that Chaucer presents as morally admirable" (191), but she reads this anachronistically as a matter of the ultimate relativization of all moral values, rather than as itself an anagogically moral, even apocalyptic unveiling of the nature of all the pilgrims save the Host himself: they are all inclined to acts of sacrifice, and without his mediating work they will inevitably be drawn to sacrificing one another.[57] This can be seen especially clearly near the end of the *Tales*, where the drunken Cook who yawns "As though he wolde swolwe us anonright" (IX.36) "wax wrooth and wraw" (IX.46) with the Manciple. The Manciple responds in kind, until he is reminded by the Host of his own "rekenynges, / That were nat honest if it cam to preef" (IX.74-5). Recalling the Manciple's own misdeeds, the Host convinces him to give the Cook what he calls a "good drynke," which "wol turne rancour and disese / T'acord and love" (IX.96-8)—once again defusing the rivalrous conflict that is always in danger of overwhelming the pilgrimage game, specifically through the medium of wine.

[57] *The Canterbury Tales* would probably respond well to a reading through the lens of the work of René Girard on sacrifice, which I do not have the space to offer here. Bernard theorizes something similar in his sermons for Palm Sunday, where he observes the "strange connection" between the passion and procession in the liturgical calendar: "what did our forebears have in mind when they added the passion to the procession? . . .The present age is a mixture of both. . . .Truly for as long as this present age abides, it ebbs and flows" ("quid cogitaverunt Patres nostri, passionem addentes processioni? . . . Istis enim mixtum est praesens saeculum, . . .Verum hoc interim dum praesens saeculum manet, vel magis manat et fluit") (2.1; V:46). Bernard's idea of "the procession as representing the glory of our heavenly homeland and the passion as the way to it" ("in processione quidem caelestis patriae repraesentamus gloriam, in passione monstramus viam") theorizes time as a chiasmus between sacrifice and love, an admirable "mixtio" that has to be embraced: "The glory of the procession makes even the suffering of the passion bearable, for *nothing is difficult for a lover*" ("Tolerabilem proinde reddit passionis laborem gloria processionis, quoniam Amanti nihil difficile est") (1.2; V:43). As I have argued, the Canterbury "procession" also has sacrificial undertones.

The confrontation with the Canon offers the *Tales*' most thorough elaboration of the sacrificial mentality that the Host's imposition of himself—and the seemingly literalistic, in fact anagogical perspective he consistently adopts—alone can avert. Drawing near to his servant as he speaks with the Host, the Canon "herde al thyng / Which this Yeman spak, for suspecioun / Of mennes speche evere hadde this Chanoun. / For Catoun seith that he that gilty is / Demeth alle thyng be spoke of hym, ywis" (VIII.685-9). At this point in the *Canon's Yeoman's Prologue*, the Yeoman has just begun his long description of the endlessly repetitious alchemical processes the Canon has coaxed him into assisting him with: "I am nat wont in no mirour to prie, / But swynke soore and lerne multiplie. / We blondren evere and pouren in the fir, / And for al that we faille of oure desir, / For evere we lakken oure conclusioun" (VIII.668-72). As the Yeoman laments, alchemy consists in an endless series of promised *futura* that never quite arrive: "Swich supposyng and hope is sharp and hard; / I warne yow wel, it is to seken evere. / That future temps hath maad man to dissevere, / In trust therof, from al that evere they hadde. / Yet of that art they kan nat wexen sadde" (VIII.873-7).[58] Like the Pardoner's relic-selling, the "multiplication" of alchemy also threatens to impact on the pilgrim host's wellbeing: "A man may lightly lerne, if he have aught, / To multiplie, and brynge his good to naught! / Lo! swich a lucre is in this lusty game, / A mannes myrthe it wol turne unto grame, / And empten also grete and hevye purses, / And maken folk for to purchacen curses" (VIII.1400-5). Thus the Canon's alchemy proves a kind of diabolical parody of the Host's own valorization of pro-creativity and fruitfulness. The Yeoman even says that his master wants to ride with the company "For his desport; he loveth daliaunce" (VIII.592), making the Canon sound like the Host; but when the

[58] As Eleanor Johnson observes, the Canon's Yeoman "is unable to stop himself from superimposing the future on the present," demonstrating his "inability to grasp—let alone take comfort in—time's linear progression as an epiphenomenal indication of divine providence and eternal love" (*Practicing Literary Theory* 147).

Canon is seen up close, he is obviously something more like the Host's opposite: suspicious of everyone and jealous of his "priyvetee," he is unwilling to speak for himself, much less to speak boldly. When the Yeoman speaks for him, "He fledde awey for verray sorwe and shame" (VIII.701-2). Although we are told that "it was joye for to seen hym swete" (VIII.579), much as the Pardoner claims of himself "That it is joye to se my bisynesse" (VI.399), the Canon does not ultimately allow us to see him work, and will not tell his tale; his *futura*-obsessed toil precludes that kind of play. Shame-ridden, something like Bernard's penitent who thinks "only of the judgment" and so falls "into the pit of despair" (6.8; I:30), in the end it is the Canon alone, and not the Pardoner, who is excluded from the Canterbury fellowship.

Interposing himself between the pilgrims and this newcomer, as if he senses some unique danger from this pale horseman whose animal "swatte that unnethe myghte it gon" (VIII.563), the Host asks the Canon's Yeoman, "Why is thy lord so sluttissh, I the preye, / And is of power bettre clooth to beye, / If that his dede accorde with thy speche?" (VIII.636-8). He asks, in other words, why it is that the Canon cannot be a "semely" man like himself, not so much in the sense of being good to look at as in the sense of simply being what he seems, and what he claims to be. The Canon, who like the Host is associated with animals but who notably overworks them, is the *Tales*' final and perhaps only great villain—a man who is ashamed of himself and of his own bodily appearance, and who therefore consistently turns "game" into "grame"; he is also, in his obsession with a promised future payoff that never quite arrives, a man who fundamentally lacks a conclusion, who seems to conceive of all existence in terms of transmuting matter into more material gain, and whose every interaction is therefore marked by a suspicion that everyone must really in the end be playing by the rules of his own power game. He is, in essence, un-anagogical man—or, in a phrasing more applicable to the *Meditationes piissimae* and the *Prick of*

Conscience, though stripped of their residual piety, a man obsessed with the *futura* at the expense of the *invisibilia*, to such an extent that the *futura* themselves are seen in terms of some literal payoff in the present. He is also therefore a man who is deeply "disenchanted"; like Leicester and the *Meditationes* author before him, he reflexively deconstructs whatever flashes of significance he detects—in his case, attempting to turn them to simple, cynical profit. The Host, on the other hand, is at once naively literal and cunningly aware of confidence tricks. He immediately perceives what is going on here in terms of a friction between claim and appearance, substance and accident; whatever the Yeoman may say about his supposedly fun-loving master, the Host can see the Canon with his own two eyes; and, as always, he is in on the joke.

Lee Patterson has argued that we must understand the Canon's Yeoman in terms of the "foregrounding of an emancipated selfhood existing apart from social determinants," and "the capacity to imagine oneself as other and more than an integer in a fixed social order, as an autonomous self"; "everywhere we look," Patterson says, "Chaucer turns from a traditionalist objectivism to a subjectively centered modernity." And yet, as Patterson admits, "if the Canon's Yeoman represents Chaucerian modernity, he is an appropriately irresolute spokesperson," marked by a "strangely unspecifiable guilt, a guilt we can now perhaps recognize as generated by the feeling that modernity itself may be a sin" ("Perpetual Motion" 57). But what if that guilt could be specified, and what if it were not so much to do with the specific sins that are the constant refrain of popular late medieval works under the influence of what Nicholas Watson calls the "*puritanical* model" ("Chaucer's Public Christianity" 102) as with the Canon's numbing shame itself, a shame at modernity's lacking something precisely like what the Host so vividly represents—a fatal split between "subjectivity" and "objectivity," intellect and affect, memory

and the self, that has made it almost impossible to escape the feeling that Watson associates elsewhere with "a process . . . called modernity, through which the past may have tended, over the last two centuries, to become inert: more and more like those accumulations of lifeless images that, in monastic imaginative regimes, were once taken to herald the onset of accidia" ("Phantasmal Past" 36)? Patterson cites "the Yeoman's fear that something crucial has already passed him by" ("Perpetual Motion" 57). What if the Host were a kind of literary last-ditch effort to revive a sense of the incarnate joys of time and of the body, in a time when these were, with the anagogical sensibility, in fatal danger of being lost? What if, in other words, we were not living in Patterson's vibrant Chaucerian modernity, but living instead in the world the *Prick of Conscience* made?

Chapter 4

"In good tyme"

After despair in Malory's "Book of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere"

One can only attain hope through truth, at the cost of great effort and long patience. To find hope, it is necessary to go beyond despair. . . .The highest form of hope is despair overcome.

—Georges Bernanos, "France Before the World of Tomorrow"

Often considered the product of Cistercian or otherwise monastic influences, the thirteenth-century Old French romance *La Queste del Saint Graal* defies easy categorization (Matarasso, "Introduction" 20-1).[1] In recent years, some have argued that the *Queste* represents the sublimation of an essentially secular enterprise; it "systematically weights down" its source material "with a 'figurative' meaning," as one critic puts it (Baumgartner 110). Nevertheless, it is clear that the *Queste* participates in a culture of what Barbara Newman has described in terms of secular and sacred "crossover."[2] This is illustrated in the *Queste* itself when the perfectly pure

[1] The classic argument for Cistercian authorship of the *Queste* is in Albert Pauphilet's *Etudes sur la Queste del Saint Graal* (75-83). P.M. Matarasso's book *The Redemption of Chivalry*: *A Study of the Queste del Saint Graal* offers a more balanced view (238-241). See also Jill Mann's "Malory and the Grail Legend" for a concise argument against specifically Cistercian authorship (207-8).

[2] Nicolette Zeeman observes that in the *Queste*, "This new version of the Arthurian quest . . . develops and stands in tension with secular Arthurian narrative," and that "the *Queste* continues to recognize the call of the secular." The tale's "emotional focus on Lancelot makes him not just an instance of failed questing, but the site of a division at the heart of the inspirational narrative of the *Queste*" ("Medieval religious allegory" 155-7). Following Jean Frappier, Jill Mann goes even further: "instead of representing an attempt to appropriate chivalry for religious ends, the Grail

Galahad and his father Lancelot finally cross paths. Galahad, a character invented for the *Queste* who distinctly embodies the ideal of the chaste warrior-monk as it was elaborated in Bernard's treatise *De laude novae militiae* ("*In Praise of the New Knighthood*") and elsewhere, expresses a deep and easy admiration for the famously adulterous and formerly best knight in the world, his father: "Upon God's name I have desired to see and be with you beyond all men alive. And it is only natural that I should, for in you is my beginning" (257-8)[3] ("A non Dieu, vos desirroie je a veoir et a avoir a compaignon sor toz cels del monde. Et je le doi bien fere, car vos estes comencement de moi" (250)).[4] Here the *Queste*'s possibly monastic author has Galahad, the figure for spiritual perfection, humble himself before the embodiment of all things chivalric, something like Dostoevsky's Father Zosima bowing down before Dmitri Karamazov. "In you is my beginning" strongly suggests that, for the *Queste* author, the ideals of romance already have some at least latent spiritual force of their own, and that the relationship between the *Queste* and the romance tradition it draws from is more than a matter of mere spiritualized flattening.

This is true for Thomas Malory as well, in the opposite direction. It is often taken for granted that Malory, very much unlike the *Queste* author, pares back whatever religious elements appear in his sources; the argument is at least as old as C.S. Lewis and Eugène Vinaver, in their companion pieces "The English Prose *Morte*" and "On Art and Nature."[5] A notable exception is the 2013 volume *Malory & Christianity: Essays on Sir Thomas Malory's Morte Darthur*, which collects several sensitive theological readings of Malory's work. I want to argue, however, for a

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romances use religion as a means of exalting the dignity of the knightly class," constituting a kind of "class gospel" ("Malory and the Grail" 208).

[3] References in English are to P.M. Matarasso's edition and translation *The Quest of the Holy Grail*, cited in my Works Cited below. They are given by page number, in parentheses.

[4] References to the original Old French are to Albert Pauphilet's edition *La Queste del Saint Graal*, cited in my Works Cited below. They are given by page number, in parentheses.

[5] Vinaver thinks Malory tends to excise the religious themes he finds in his sources; Lewis thinks this is too simple a generalization. Lewis concludes that Malory's work is "ethical as against mystical. But we must not say 'ethical, as against religious'" (17).

more specifically Bernardine lens on the text, by way of the dual influence of the possibly Cistercian *Queste* and of Bernard's popularity in England. In the conclusion to her book-length study of Malory's use of the *Queste* for his own "Tale of the Sankgreal," Sandra Ness Ihle emphasizes that Malory grants the more worldly Lancelot, as opposed to the more spiritual Galahad, an expanded role in his work, and a closer experience of the Grail than is granted him in the *Queste*. She concludes that Malory has "adapted his source to give it a new meaning and significance; from a completely allegorical work whose adventures are a means to a partial discovery of a higher truth, he has fashioned a tale whose final goal becomes an excuse for the discovery, through adventure, of the good to which man can attain on earth" (164).[6] Although this is a more balanced view than either Lewis's or Vinaver's, even this dichotomy should not be pressed too far.[7] Malory's work discovers not just "the good to which man can attain on earth," but also, and arguably with more force, the evil there, too; and the good that is attained is therefore almost always "partial"—there are few more indelible figures for the partial intimation of higher truth than the enigmatic phrase on Arthur's tomb, "rex quondam rexque futurus" ("the once and future king").[8] Newman uses the case of King David—who is, in his relationship with Bathsheba, a notorious sinner in what Newman calls the *sensus litteralis*, but a celebrated figure for Christ in the *sensus mysticus*—to illustrate what she identifies as part of the "deep structure

[6] Along similar lines, Fiona Tolhurst observes that Malory "integrates Galahad into a spiritualized but still secular Round Table community rather than into an unearthly Grail community" and "blends chivalric brotherhood with individual Christian identity" (136-7), staking out a "theological middle ground between the absolute moral standard of thirteenth-century monasticism and the flexible one of earthly chivalry" (149). This issues in what she describes as "Malory's practical Christianity" (151).

[7] Ihle does claim that the "Sankgreal" is "not less religious" than the *Queste*; rather, Malory "locates religious standards within the requirements of chivalry" (161). Beyond this, I believe that Malory also locates the requirements of chivalry within the standards of religion, making the *Morte* a work of real "crossover" and of original theological speculation.

[8] As D. Thomas Hanks, Jr. points out, in Malory's sources for the last book of the *Morte Darthur*, "Arthur dies and that's the end of him. . . .Malory changes that, to hint that Arthur still lives, in some mystic stasis, and will return again." While there are analogues for the idea that Arthur has perhaps survived, there are none for Malory's suggestion that he has been transported by the will of Jesus so that he might return to win the Holy Cross, and so that this is a "somehow-Christian survival" (19).

of medieval romance," which renders Ihle's distinction still potentially misleading: an embrace of the "hermeneutics of double judgment" (23), whereby the same character or figure to can illustrate both a more literal, earth-bound lesson and a more mysterious, even sometimes contradictory, higher truth. What Ihle construes as a move away from the *sensus mysticus* in Malory is in my view a more daring embrace of this double structure, a staged confrontation between a more vividly imagined *sensus litteralis* and a still ultimate *sensus mysticus*—rather than an attempt, like the monastic *Queste* author's, to assimilate the two onto one univocal narrative plane, where the literal husk of the text directly corresponds with and straightforwardly discloses the kernel of mystical, allegorical meaning.

Malory's use of the *Queste del Saint Graal* should therefore be understood not as a "secularization" project, but rather as a deliberate *ressourcement* of a deeply theological text, re-purposed to serve Malory's own distinctive literary and even theological ends. After all, to be less allegorical is not necessarily to be less religious. My study so far has suggested that figures like Langland's Nede and Chaucer's Host in fact stage a fourteenth-century reaction, in the literary form of what Newman calls "imaginative theology," against what might be called over-allegorical, or un-anagogical, Christianity, where a moralistic dualism at times threatened to reduce popular theological discourse to the disembodied platitudes that drive the Pseudo-Bernardine *Meditationes piissimae de cognitione humanae conditionis* and, to an extent, the *Prick of Conscience*. Along similar lines, Felicity Riddy has noted the "eucharistic emphasis of Malory's treatment of the Grail" (132); the object that began as a mysterious dish in Chrétien de Troyes's *Perceval* becomes in Malory, by a subtle adjustment of his source in the *Queste*, a markedly physical figure for the miracle of the Real Presence. In Riddy's reading, this shows Malory adjusting his source "as a fifteenth-century layman," conditioned by the threat of

Lollardy to emphasize the fact of transubstantiation (133). Less allegory could be said to mean, in this instance, more plain orthodoxy.[9] In any case, Malory's emphasis on the eucharist is in line with a by no means irreligious resistance to making too strong a distinction between "a partial discovery of higher truth" and the "good to which man can attain on earth." The distinctions drawn by Ihle and others, spurred on by the assumption of a monastic authorship of the *Queste*, have tended to imply that a lay medieval writer like Malory would have likely foregone serious engagement with theological questions;[10] the paradoxical result has been that Malory criticism, just when it comes to describe Malory's relation to a possibly monastic source, has too often ignored the importance of monastic thought for all medieval culture, literary and political (even chivalric) as well as spiritual—this in spite of the fact that Malory's fifteenth century was a time of noted lay interest in what it means to live the best possible religious life outside of the religious orders.[11] It has therefore missed and minimized that same dimension that I have argued was particularly forgotten in recent treatments of Chaucer and of Langland: the importance of

[9] Catherine Batt provides an overview of the debate over Malory's religious background in terms of the tension between Colin Richmond's view of fifteenth-century gentry religion as an "increasingly individual and privatized experience" and Eamon Duffy's idea of an "actively and publicly pious laity involved in the work of the Church" (133-4). As D. Thomas Hanks, Jr. and Janet Jesmok point out, Christine Carpenter has come down strongly on the side of Duffy, arguing for the "idea of strongly orthodox views among the greater part of the late medieval gentry class." As they also observe, "The many later accounts of the prayerful vigil observed prior to the knighting ceremony suggest that Malory, coming from a lineage of knights, would have seen his vocation as armed godliness, related in kind to the Crusades" (3). It is interesting, in view of this, that Malory preserves the idea of Lancelot's ending his life with a period of non-crusading penitence and religious service.

[10] As I have noted above, this tendency is of course not universal. Dorsey Armstrong's maneuvering around the issue is, however, representative of a drift in the criticism: although there is an "emphasis on devotion to God" in the *Suite du Merlin*, not to mention the monastic *Queste del Saint Graal*—which Malory chooses to use despite the fact that "more secular versions of this story were available to him"—"In the *Morte Darthur*, such spiritual devotion is largely absent, eclipsed by more chivalric concerns. . . .Malory's depiction of knighthood isn't particularly religious, because knighthood *is* the religion." On the very next page, stepping back to consider the importance of the Grail Quest for the whole *Morte Darthur*, Armstrong muses, "Christianity in Malory, it seems, is contradictorily both incredibly important and relatively insignificant" (112).

[11] This is exemplified in Middle English by the popularity of Walter Hilton's writing, especially his *Mixed Life*. Giles Constable's article "Twelfth-Century Spirituality and the Late Middle Ages" discusses the overlap between the spiritualities of the fifteenth and twelfth centuries, especially in terms of the fifteenth century's resistance to the "distinction between the active and contemplative lives" and "the intrinsic superiority of monasticism" (43). Nicholas Watson's article "Chaucer's Public Christianity" addresses similar themes in terms of fourteenth-century English literature.

anagogical and incarnational modes of thinking not just for the moments of explicit theological reflection in their respective texts, but even for the most essential building blocks of their literary forms. As we will see, some of Malory's most distinctive formal interventions, and most original additions to his source material, serve distinctly theological ends.

Translating the *Queste*

We have every reason to believe that Malory took spiritual ideals, and the *Queste del Saint Graal*, very seriously. As Helen Cooper points out, the "Tale of the Sankgreal" is by far the book of Malory's works that cleaves closest to its source, amounting to a sort of shorthand translation of the Old French *Queste* ("The Lancelot-Grail Cycle" 158). Malory himself called this sixth book "a tale chronicled for one of the truest and one of the holiest that is in the world" (847).[12] As other scholars have shown, he significantly re-works the sources of every other one of his tales, but leaves the *Queste* more or less intact and in a pivotal position in the *Morte*, coming as it does just before the final two books that trace the gradual dissolution of the Round Table. This implies an appreciation of the monastic text on already established grounds, rather than a mere begrudging inclusion or hasty attempt to integrate the *Queste*'s more spiritualized vision of knighthood. The *Queste* itself was not at all, in my view, the source of Malory's own religious interests, but rather a confirmation of them,[13] and an encouragement to engage more deeply with what Erich Auerbach described as "another movement" that, arising

[12] All references to Malory are to P.J.C. Field's edition of Vinaver's *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, cited in my Works Cited below. Hereafter, references are given by page number, in parentheses.

[13] This raises the difficult question of the order in which the *Morte Darthur*'s books were composed. P.J.C. Field points out that Malory substitutes Pelleas for Perceval in his brief account of the Grail Quest at the end of "The Tale of King Arthur," making it unlikely that he had translated the *Queste* before writing the first book at least of the *Morte Darthur* (1). This should serve as a caution against over-privileging Malory's treatment of the *Queste* in any study of theology's role in the *Morte*. As I will argue, Malory's most original adaptations of and additions to his sources, many of which occur in his "Book of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere," are also the sites of his most sustained theological reflection.

"contemporaneously with courtly culture," "gave expression to this graduated proving of election, as well as to the theory of love, with much greater rigor and clarity—namely, Victorine and Cistercian mysticism" (*Mimesis* 136). For Malory, chivalric and monastic ideals interrogate and reinforce one another, and are by no means mutually exclusive.

In the *Queste*, on the other hand, the courtly does indeed tend to get subordinated to the monastic: the Quest for the Holy Grail acts as a winnowing vehicle of judgment, superimposing a new theological hierarchy on the previously established ranking of the knights' prowess in battle. The *Queste* knights' success is no longer determined by their value as icons of courtly largesse, but rather by their piety and purity alone. In this new, more spiritual order, even faithful marriage is devalued: the *Queste* does not necessarily condemn Arthur's marriage to the Queen, but it does flatly disqualify him from even setting out on the Quest for the Grail.[14] Arthur is left alone to mourn the disbanding of his Round Table. With the *Queste* the Round Table is ineluctably pulled toward its end in the now immanentized anagogical *futura*; what was introduced as an inexhaustible symbol of the cosmos, "devised . . . to embody a very subtle meaning" (99) ("qui ne fu pas establie sanz grant senefiance" (76)),[15] has its eschatological Seat of Danger filled in by Galahad, and from now on the knights will all, as the *Queste* author admits, "consume their days in bootless pursuit of the Holy Grail" (99) ("toz dis foloieront . . . a quierre le Saint Graal" (77)). The *Queste* represents the pathos of this—"And even those men who fancied themselves hard and proud shed tears at this leave-taking" (53) ("Si plorerent assez a cel departement cil qui plus cuidoient avoir les cuers et durs et orgueillox" (26))—but it is

[14] Though Malory leaves this disqualification intact, he deletes a passage from the *Queste* on "the distinction between spiritual virginity (a lack of carnal desire as well as of carnal relations) and physical virginity (a lack of carnal relations)," in addition to an earlier passage on the necessity of Perceval's remaining a virgin. In the former case, he also excises a related passage in which Adam and Eve experience "shame at the thought of copulating" on their way out of Eden (Tolhurst 133-7).

[15] Matarasso's translation is strong here; Christopher Baswell suggests "not without considerable meaning."

ultimately as unwavering in its mission as Galahad is in his own. Its author, like Chaucer's Parson, has come to knit up all this feast and make an end.

Malory does react to, and in some respects even against, these drifts in his source. The mere fact of his not making the *Queste* the model for the last book of the *Morte* shows him denying this monastic romance the final word. As Riddy suggests, Malory shows a pointed preference throughout his work for orthodox eucharistic theology—and therefore for the tension between presence and absence, *invisibilia* and *futura*, that this theology entails. To stress the simplicity of the eucharistic real presence as a "fifteenth-century layman" is also to resist somewhat the *Queste*'s suggestion that the implications of this presence can be easily read into reality, in a way would collapse the "eschatological tension" of the present age on which the sacramental order is premised. Somewhat like Chaucer's own eucharistic Host in his opposition to the Canon's alchemy, Malory resists the *Queste* author's attempt to make—in a much more sacred vein than that of the Canon—eschatological gold out of the rough materials of the present.

In some cases, and in his own more earthbound way, Malory in fact refines the *Queste* author's theological thinking. He pays particular attention to the psychological makeup of specific sins.[16] Early in his quest, Lancelot sees the Grail heal a sick knight; half-dozing, he fails to approach the Grail himself. In both the *Queste* and in Malory's "Sankgreal," a white-habited, presumably Cistercian hermit soon explains to Lancelot that his mortal sin weighed him down and kept him from approaching the Grail as it passed. The specifics of the explanations offered, however, differ significantly: Malory removes a long reproach in terms of Jesus's parable of the three servants—though he preserves the idea that Lancelot is to be specially reprimanded because he has been especially gifted—but introduces a new criticism of what the hermit calls

[16] As Tolhurst puts it, Malory has a "tendency to clarify his source text, whether or not theology is involved." This leads him at times to undertake "revision for theological clarity" (134).

specifically Lancelot's "presumpcion to take uppon you in dedely synne for to be in Hys presence, where Hys fleyssh and Hys blood was" (896). When Lancelot agrees to confess his sins, the two accounts once again diverge: in the *Queste*, the hermit adjures Lancelot, "promise me never again to trespass against your Maker by committing mortal sin with the queen" ("me creantez que ja mes ne mefferoiz a vostre creator en fesant pechié mortel de la reine"); acquiescing, "Lancelot plighted his troth as a true knight" (90) ("il li creante come loiaux chevaliers" (67)). The phrasing of Malory's hermit is much more circumspect: "ensure me by youre knyghthode ye shall no more com in that quenys felyship as much as ye may forbere" (897). The whole confession scene shows Malory paying especially close attention to the specific nature of Lancelot's sin, stressing more than the *Queste* author does its thoughtless pride and eucharistic insensibility. Again, Malory does not simply excise the *Queste*'s theology; instead, he carefully spins his source's more monastic theology in a more lay-oriented, less purity-centered direction.[17]

Helen Cooper has recommended that, in considering Lancelot's relationship with Guinevere, Malory's readers "set aside the category of 'adultery' altogether: not because it is not an issue . . . but because it pre-empts too much. It puts an end to thought, just at the point where thinking ought to start" (*The English Romance* 320). In his treatment of Lancelot's confession scene, Malory seems to be thinking harder about that adultery than the author of the *Queste*. His introduction of "presumpcion" marks an advance on the *Queste* hermit, who identifies the mortal sin of adultery as Lancelot's problem but does not identify Lancelot's sin of thinking himself worthy of the Grail in spite of it. The *Queste*'s identification of mortal sin is the more schematic;

[17] As I noted in Chapter Three, the historian John Bossy has described a fourteenth-century "community ethics" that made "more excuse for the sins of concupiscence than for those of aversion," because "sins of aversion destroy community" (35). Purity, a monastic and especially Cistercian point of emphasis, is not at the center of Malory's moral universe, as it was not at the center of the Parson's. Community is.

Malory's identification of presumption, the more thoughtfully diagnostic.[18] The second divergence cited above shows Malory softening what the hermit asks of Lancelot, not necessarily because Malory endorses the adultery, but more likely because Malory knows that in his version of the story, Lancelot will in fact sin with the Queen again. The adjustments are made not so much to excuse Lancelot as to make his characterization over the course of the whole *Morte Darthur* more consistent, and to consistently identify the specific way in which Lancelot fails. Malory's Lancelot has typical flaws—not just his adultery but also, and for Malory more seriously, his presumption and pride—but in the *Morte Darthur* he apparently keeps his promise to refrain from sin "as much as ye may forbere," helping to make sense of his eventual salvation and even sanctification at the *Morte*'s end.[19] Malory's engagement with the *Queste* here and elsewhere therefore marks a movement not from the religious to the secular, but, as C.S. Lewis suggested, from the "mystical"-religious to the "ethical"-religious realm, where the things of this world are permeated with—without being overwhelmed by—the things of eternity (17). This leaves Lancelot's freedom to judge and to act, crucially, still in play, even after his failure in the Quest, and at least all the way to the end of the "Book of Lancelot and Guinevere," and leaves Malory room to explore the more mundane themes of sin and repentance that the *Queste del Saint Graal* systematically neglects.

The consequences of Malory's turn toward ethical-religious questions reach far beyond his translation of the *Queste*. The "Sankgreal" is in fact used as a kind of organizing principle for

[18] Along similar lines, Nicolette Zeeman notes that in the *Queste* "these holy men with their schematic and (often literally) black-and-white glosses scarcely sum up the meaning and spiritual or affective impact of these narratives. The *Queste* knights who seek and suffer become part of a reiterative, typological narrative of sacramental wounding and sacrifice that stretches back to the crucifixion" ("Medieval religious allegory" 156). As I will argue, Malory is sensitive to this typological patterning, and fills in some of the gaps in the *Queste*'s over-schematism.

[19] Lancelot's body is said to smell sweet after his death, and a Bishop sees a vision of him being welcomed at the gates of heaven. As Hanks, Jr. puts it, with this "added theme," "central to the *Morte*," "Christian doctrine insists and Malory's fiction proclaims that human love, even adulterous human love, does not preclude a holy end" (22).

the rest of Malory's work, often foreshadowed in the books preceding it and harkened back to in the books that follow. In his essay "'The Tale of King Arthur': Beginnings and Foreshadowings," Thomas L. Wright makes two important points about the first tale of the *Morte Darthur*: first, that Malory's Old French source for "The Tale of King Arthur," known as the *Suite du Merlin*, presented its translator with a source text "conditioned by the idea that the Grail adventures impend as the central event of Arthurian history" (12); and second, that Malory's response to that centrality was not at all to downplay the apparent importance of the Grail in favor of his less theology-burdened adventures, but rather to carefully clarify the place of the Grail, and of its particular religious sensibility, in relation to the other quests of the Round Table. As Wright points out, Malory makes Merlin a "spokesman of God" as never quite before, reinforcing the *Suite*'s already strong sense that providence plays a role in the installment of Arthur as King (26). On the other hand, this and other alterations to Malory's source text mean that the Round Table is instituted not so much for the sake of the Grail Quest as for its own sake, heightening the eschatological tension between transcendence and immanence, the Grail and the Round Table, that the *Queste del Saint Graal* tends to simply collapse. Malory therefore responds flexibly to the presence of the Grail in his source, both cementing the ties between this first tale and his "Sankgreal" to come and, at the same time, making "The Tale of King Arthur," and so the Round Table itself, more something of its own, dependent on the Grail quest for its fulfillment but not for its meaning in every instance. Somewhat like the Pseudo-Dionysian "symbol" in M.-D. Chenu's reading of it, Malory's use of the Grail demonstrates his unique "approach to intelligible reality," which is emphatically not—as the *Queste* author's tends to be—"an explanation of the world of sense by means of that reality." Instead, the *Morte Darthur* author's imagination begins most characteristically with "the lowest material level, on which the

mind of man found its connatural objects" (82)—with the Grail but also with the Round Table that precedes it; with Galahad, but also with Lancelot's stubbornly irreducible, often presumptuous humanity. Unlike the monastic *Queste* author, Malory is always reluctant to leave the level of the merely human behind.

Wright's conclusion concerning the first tale's use of the Grail helps to clarify the role the Quest for the Grail plays in the *Morte Darthur* more generally:

> The *Suite du Merlin* achieved in the Grail quest a truly central motive which offered a sense of direction, an exceptional goal, an extraordinary challenge to test the moral sinew of a battle-proven court. But this test was spiritual and not social, a contest with the divine rather than the human, whereas it is above all else the struggle of man with himself that lies at the heart of *Le Morte Darthur*. (62-3)

This struggle is also at the heart of Malory's "Sankgreal," where Lancelot struggles with himself as no one else does in the whole *Morte Darthur*. It also lies behind Malory's depiction of the foundation of the chivalric order as something importantly separate from the Quest of the Grail; as Wright points out, "the Arthurian characters will move in a system of order which ultimately fails them, and which turns the structure of their society into chaos again" (66). But Malory's emphasis on earthly conflict does not lead him to discard the irruption of transcendence that the *Queste del Saint Graal* represents; the whole rest of the *Morte* labors under the absence and in the aftermath of this "contest with the divine." Malory's most distinctive preoccupations lie instead in his insistence that the struggle with the self and the contest with the divine cannot at the deepest level be separated out, and his consequently close attention to the way the self understands itself in relation to others and to God. In a later section of this chapter I will offer an extended analysis of the two critical sequences in the *Morte Darthur* that are in my view most

informed by this preoccupation: "The Book of Balin" and "Lancelot and Guinevere," especially the original "Healing of Sir Urry" sequence. But first, to describe the way Malory might have conceived of these two decisive struggles, I will turn again to the "greater rigor and clarity" of Cistercian mysticism, admired by Auerbach and perhaps, however indirectly, by Malory—an avid, if not impassive, reader of the possibly Cistercian *Queste*.

Shame and simplicity in Malory's *Morte Darthur*

Taking Jill Mann's advice to begin our reading of Malory with the "terms . . . suggested by the work itself" ("Knightly Combat" 332), I will begin with presumption, the sin Malory specifically ascribes to Lancelot in the "Sankgreal" and a word that recurs at crucial points in the other books of the *Morte Darthur*. In a passage from his treatise *De diligendo deo* ("*On Loving God*") that I have cited in passing earlier in this study, Bernard offers a summary of his view of the importance of self-knowledge and the corresponding dangers of presumption and despair:

> Therefore it is necessary that you know two things: both what you are, and that you are not so by your own power, so that you do not either glory not at all, or vainly glory. . . .what is most to be abhorred is presumption, by which you knowingly and deliberately dare to seek glory with goods that are not your own. . . .It is, in fact, pride, and the greatest sin, to use one's gifts as if they were innate in oneself, and to usurp the glory of the benefactor by means of his benefices.
>
> ("Utrumque ergo scias necesse est, et quid sis, et quod a teipso non sis, ne aut omnino videlicet non glorieris, aut inaniter glorieris. . . .exsecranda illa praesumptio est, qua sciens et prudens forte audeas de bonis non tuis tuam quaerere gloriam. . . .Est quippe

superbia et delictum maximum, uti datis tamquam innatis, et in acceptis beneficiis gloriam usurpare benefici.") (II.4; III:122-3)

Here Bernard identifies the willful ignorance of presumption—exemplified in Malory's Lancelot by his approaching the sacrament knowing himself to be in mortal sin—with pride, the "greatest sin."[20] But first, Bernard emphasizes something that crucially aligns his thought with Malory's more chivalric ideal: the importance of combatting both over- and under-evaluation of the self. These are the two conspiring poles that Bernard refers to elsewhere as "pride" and "despair" or, when discussed in terms of their positive aspects, as the complementary attitudes toward God of "love" and "fear."[21] Perhaps Bernard's greatest interpreter in Middle English, Julian of Norwich,[22] produced several adaptations of this idea in her own writing. In her *Revelation of Love* she writes, "thus in this dred, I have matter of mekenesse, that saveth me fro presumption. And in the blessed shewing of love, I have mater of true comforte and of joy, that saveth me fro despair" (369).[23] The answer for Julian, as for Bernard, is not an anxious balancing between the

[20] In his second sermon for the feast of St. Andrew, Bernard identifies pride with the noonday devil, and calls it the root of all sin: "But look! Here is the sickness that destroys at noonday, the spirit of pride that often rises up against us subtly in a shining array of virtues. We take care frequently to point out to you how pernicious this is. For *the beginning of all sin* and the cause of all damnation *is pride*" ("Sed ecce daemonium meridianum, superbiae scilicet spiritus, qui nimirum in maiori splendore virtutum acrius insurgere solet. Haec autem quam perniciosa sit, saepius vobis intimare curamus. Initium quippe Omnis peccati et causa totius perditionis Superbia est."). This passage serves as another warning against the over-simplified exegetical readings of the noonday devil I criticized in Chapter One, and as a reminder that Bernard's vision of the virtues is idiosyncratic and importantly monastic. For Bernard, there is no substitute for the humility of the cross: "it is only on this [top] arm [of the cross, which resists the noonday demon of pride] that the title of salvation and of sovereignty is inscribed, because only the one who humbles himself merits to be saved and lifted up" ("Sane hoc solum est, cui salutis pariter et regni titulus inscribitur, quia solus qui se humiliat salvari et exaltari meretur") (7-8; V:439).

[21] See the thirty-seventh sermon on the Song of Songs: "As the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, so the beginning of all sin is pride; and in the same way that the love of God lays claim for itself to the perfection of wisdom, so despair lays claim to the total consummation of malice" ("sicut Initium sapientiae timor Domini, sic Initium omnis peccati superbia; et quomodo perfectionem sibi sapientiae vindicat amor Dei, ita desperatio sibi omnem malitiae consummationem") (37.6; II:12).

[22] I do not have space to defend this suggestion here. As I noted in Chapter Two, Julian recognizably cites Bernard, which is very rare in her writing. She is clearer and more original on the theme of presumption and despair than any other vernacular writer I am aware of, and is in my view the best representative of a Middle English counter-tradition that recuperates the essence of Bernard's mystical vision.

[23] A little earlier in the *Revelation*, Julian describes the "two manner of sicknesse that we have" in slightly different terms: "one is unpatiens or slouth. . . .The other is despair or doughtfulle drede." Of the latter she writes, "we . . . fall

two extremes, but a love and an understanding of the self as loved that transcends them both: "For the blessed comfort that I sawe, it is large inough for us alle." For now, however, most of us will tend to oscillate between the two.[24]

Knights in Malory tend to be on the one hand what could be called hieratic, or even simple-minded—their resistance to psychologizing has led Mann to recommend banishing the word "character" from the vocabulary of Arthurian studies altogether ("Knightly Combat" 332)—and yet, they are constantly reflecting on themselves in terms of their "worship," and on their "worship" as potentially compromised by their "shame." "Worship" suggests at first something of the pride that we would expect Bernard or any other theologian to warn against. And yet "worship" in Malory often seems to work as a motivation for ethical behavior, and even for a sense of self-worth that is reminiscent of Bernard's emphasis on the dignity of the soul as created by God; knowing "what you are" ("quid sis") is, in the *De diligendo deo*'s formulation, most fundamentally a reason to glory. "Shame" has a similar double valence in the Bernardine scheme. For all Bernard's emphasis on humility—his first treatise is written *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae* ("*On the Steps of Humility and Pride*")—he emphasizes equally that something like shame is only productive when it is directed toward God; to feel shame for what you are most essentially is to despair, and so to insult the goodness of God's creation. If "worship" and "shame" both have a potentially sinful aspect, it is nonetheless easy to see how both could, therefore, in the Bernardine schema, also be made productive, harnessed toward a

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oftimes into so moche wrechednes that shame it is to say it. And the beholding of this maketh us so sory and so hevy that unnethes we can see ony comfort. And this drede we take sometime for a mekenes, but it is a foule blindhede and a wekenesse" (352-3). It is perhaps easier to see here than it is in Bernard's writing itself just what the Pseudo-Bernardine *Meditationes piissimae* and the *Prick of Conscience* were missing, and what imaginative theologians like Langland, Chaucer, and Julian attempted to recuperate.

[24] Julian describes herself as struggling with this oscillation: "In this liking, I was fulfillede of the everlasting sekernesse, mightely fastned without any painefulle drede. . . .This lasted but a while, and I was turned and left to myselfe in hevines and werines of my life and irkenes of myselfe, that unneth I could have patience to live…. And anon after this, oure blessed lorde gave me again the comfort and the rest in soule" (175-7).

regular recalibration of the self and its self-image that recalls mankind to its natural dignity when it has lost its sense of this, and reminds it of the distance between its present state and that original dignity when it is in danger of treating its gifts "as if they were innate in oneself."

In fact, this process of combatting under- and over-evaluation of the self is, I believe, just as important for Malory as it is for Bernard, and represents one way in which Malory may be said at times even to "sacralize" his romance sources. The de-psychologizing Mann notices really is one of the marks of the ideal Malorian knight; the "prevy hate" of Mordred and Aggravayne for Lancelot and Guinevere (1161), which brings about the fall of the Round Table, is characteristic of the way, in Malory's work, what is depicted as peculiarly "inward" is almost always corrosive in its effects. As Elizabeth Edwards puts it, "subjectivity is presented as the result of errors, and as the source of errors" (*Genesis* 170). But this too has its corollary in Bernard's description of the ideal Christian selfhood. In fact, an appropriately calibrated Bernardine soul might look much like the hieratic, de-psychologized selves Mann describes, entirely unlike the psychological tangles we tend to think of as proper fictional "characters." This can be seen in the way Bernard describes the self before God in terms of three qualities, inherent in every soul and forfeited only by way of sin: natural freedom of will, natural immortality, and natural simplicity. As I pointed out in Chapter Two, simplicity is the first of the three that Bernard describes, and the one he discusses at greatest length (81.2, II:284-5); it is lost, he says, only when the soul foregoes the natural alignment of its will with God's, substituting a putatively autonomous self-will for its necessarily dependent freedom. The resultant duplicity necessarily leads the soul into an unnatural "realm of unlikeness" ("regio dissimilitudinis"), an Augustinian formulation Bernard employs to describe the alienation from oneself and one's creator that is experienced when this original simplicity is abandoned in favor of the self-will's duplicitous

impositions.[25] Even then, "there nonetheless perseveres in every soul, along with its original duplicity, a native simplicity" ("perseverat nihilominus in omni anima cum originali duplicitate generalis simplicitas") (82.3; II:294). Fallen humanity, condemned by its illusion of autonomy to struggle with itself, forgetting that its own creation was an unwilled gift of grace, nevertheless cannot erase the mark, the "character," of its former glory.

The ideal knight for Malory and the ideal monk for Bernard are both therefore characterized by a simplicity that is free from the presumptuousness of self-will. Like human beings for Bernard, knights in Malory simply are glorious; but maintaining this glory depends on a faithful dependence on something like grace as the guarantee of one's God-given identity. Otherwise, one will slide again into presumption and despair, over-assertion and hopeless disappointment. In a similar vein, Erich Auerbach calls the knight's experience of "adventure" in romance a "fated and graduated test of election; . . . the basis of a doctrine of personal perfection through a development dictated by fate" (*Mimesis* 136). This emphasis on election is balanced by an insistence on the importance of individual volition: "The personal element in the courtly virtues is not simply a gift of nature; . . . preserving them requires the unforced will to renew them by constant and tireless practice and proving" (134). The process of "proving" oneself in adventures is, in Auerbach's reading, importantly both passive and active; it is "fated," a "test of election," and yet it calls for the "constant and tireless" exercise of "the unforced will." In his influential essay "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel," Mikhail Bakhtin also emphasizes the importance of something like faith for the romance knight, acted out in this process of testing that is most typically called "adventure." Unlike Auerbach, however, Bakhtin does not note the relationship between the ideals of chivalric romance and those of monastic

[25] Étienne Gilson's *The Mystical Theology of Saint Bernard* provides a good overview of these themes (45-6). As I noted in Chapter Two, for Augustine's *regio* see his *Confessions* VII, 10.16.

mysticism. Perhaps it is because he is at no pains to distinguish "secular" chivalry from the realm of the religious, that his description of the experience of chivalric "adventure-time" resonates so easily and deeply with the Christian and specifically Bernardine ideal of the natural simplicity of the soul:

> Any adventure-time will contain a mixture of chance, fate, the gods and so forth. Indeed, this type of time emerges only at points of rupture (when some hiatus opens up) in normal, real-life, "law-abiding" temporal sequences, where these laws (of whatever sort) are *suddenly* violated and events take an unexpected and unforeseen turn. This "suddenly" is normalized, as it were, in chivalric romances; it becomes something generally applicable, in fact, almost ordinary. The whole world becomes miraculous, so the miraculous becomes ordinary without ceasing at the same time to be miraculous. . . .
>
> The hero of a chivalric romance . . . plunges headfirst into adventures as if they were his native element; for him, the world exists exclusively under the sign of the miraculous "suddenly"; it is the normal condition of his world. He is an adventurer, but a disinterested one (he is not, of course, an adventurer in the later sense of the word, that is, in the sense of a man who coldbloodedly pursues his own greedy goals by extraordinary means). By his very nature he can live only in this world of miraculous chance, for only it preserves his identity. And the very code by which he measures his identity is calibrated precisely to this world of miraculous chance. . . . (151-2)

According to Bahktin, by his very nature, the knight must plunge "headfirst" into the world of "miraculous chance," making no provisions for presumed autonomy or even for self-evaluation. The Bakhtinian knight is bound, in essence, to a faithful reliance on the intervention of grace, the

great “miraculous suddenly” that becomes, in the world of Christian theology as in the world of romance, “almost ordinary.”

And yet, this picture of the miraculous, adventuring knight is not without its own implicit tensions. In comparison with the Bernardine scheme, one might ask a question that seems to have occurred very clearly to Malory: in a world of pure grace, where is the guardrail against presumption? If the world of the miraculous suddenly is indeed the knight’s “native element,” it is clear that the knight himself is in some way miraculous; as Bernard might have put it, he has a “native simplicity” that is on some level inalienable from him, and that should guard him against the dangers of despairing of himself and of his essentially miraculous world. But what about Bernard’s “realm of unlikeness,” where the soul becomes misaligned with the world it was made for? Or, in other words, what about sin? This recalls Jennifer Herdt’s concern with those “early modern hyper-Augustinians” for whom “A pure will, a pure heart, must first be given by God in some way outside of, and discontinuous with, ordinary moral psychology,” conjuring an essentially “passive human self” (3). Malory’s ethical-religious bent leads him to refuse the temptation to sidestep this question, and so to emphasize not only the simplicity of the upright self as it is seen in the best of his knights, but also that this simplicity must be achieved by means of a habitual self-surrender, a progressively ingrained resistance to the more self-centered “subjectivity” that Edwards identifies as a “source of errors.” At the same time, this brings Malory to rethink the nature of despair; as we will see, his most original contributions to Lancelot’s story arc identify a sort of presumptuousness in despair itself, a distinct presumption in Lancelot’s understanding his falling back into habitual sin as something that necessarily makes him less than or other than he was made to be. The world of the *Morte Darthur*, like the world as St. Bernard describes it, is one in which a phrase from the contemporary theologian

Karl Barth might resonate: "Everyone who has to contend with unbelief should be advised that he ought not to take his unbelief too seriously. Only faith is to be taken seriously" (20-1). But it is perhaps harder than Bakhtin's "miraculous" reading of romance might suggest to determine just what faith means in Malory, and how exactly one is to take it seriously. Some of the most essential moments in the *Morte Darthur*, from Lancelot's adultery to Balin's death at the hands of his own brother, depend on these questions.

Taking the Wrong Adventure: Presumption and Despair in Malory's "Book of Balin"

The Winchester Manuscript gives the first tale of the *Morte Darthur*, "The Tale of King Arthur," two subtitles: "The Book of Balin" and "The Wedding of King Arthur." The strange centrality of Balin's story—strange considering how short-lived Balin's knighthood is, and how relentlessly tragic—has made it a favorite for literary critics. Jill Mann's seminal essay, "Taking the Adventure: Malory and the *Suite du Merlin*," advanced a thought-provoking interpretation of the "Balin" story, arguing that understanding the meaning of "aventure" in Malory depends on recognizing that "The knight who undertakes an adventure submits to chance, in order to discover what chance has allotted him" (79). In the story itself, what Balin discovers is that, by taking a sword from a lady who says the sword can only be unsheathed by "a passynge good man of hys hondys and of hys dedis, and withoute velony other trechory and withoute treson" (61-2), he has in fact ensured that he will kill the man he loves most, and, as the lady herself puts it, "the swerde shall be youre destruccion" (64). For Mann, that Balin discovers particularly unfortunate things about his fate only makes him a better illustration of what she calls the "split between self and destiny" in the *Morte* (84)—the fact that adventures do not arrive as predetermined expressions of a knight's underlying selfhood, but rather as contingent outside circumstances to

which the knight must adapt himself. Following Mann, J. Allan Mitchell sees in Balin Malory's "most emphatic example of the one who is *touched by events*" (129)—again, a figure for the preeminence of contingency and of the split between the self and its fate in the world of the *Morte Darthur*. Somehow, finding Balin at the end of his tale sprawled out on his back next to the brother he has just slain, doomed to lie there alive till "the mydnyghte after" his brother has expired (91), we are meant in these readings to see him, as Mitchell puts it, "realizing the aspirations of all heroes of chivalric romance. . . .given over to temporality and exteriority . . . individuated by a strange adventure" (129).

To argue that Balin's fate has anything to do with his or anyone's "aspirations" requires a remarkable degree of abstraction from the story. This is an abstraction already inherent in Mann's reading, and only slightly dramatized by Mitchell. Like Mann's, Mitchell's argument assumes a great deal about what he calls the "contingent and agonistic realm of romance" (129), the world of Balin's relentlessly tragic downfall. This "realm" is in fact almost a parody, a kind of negative or mirror image, of the world of "miraculous chance" as it was described by Bakhtin—a world in which every "chance," even the worst possible one, is experienced as the preservation of identity, and as the mysterious but sure providence of, and opportunity for, the operation of something like grace. And yet it is true that Balin finds his way into a "contingent and agonistic realm" of his own, and true also that his story represents, as Mann puts it, "a miniature version of the tragedy which is to engulf the whole Arthurian world" ("Taking the Adventure" 75). What Mann and Mitchell in fact offer up, by way of a total sympathy with Balin's mistakes and with the fortune-ruled world in which he eventually finds himself—leaving an impressive body count in his wake—is a sort of negative theology of adventure, useful insofar as it calls attention to the real difficulties of what is sometimes called "taking the adventure" in

Malory in the right, ethical-religious way. Ultimately, it is neither in the world of "miraculous chance," nor in the world of sheer "temporality and exteriority," that Malory situates his heroes, but instead somewhere in the "eschatological tension" between them. As with Lancelot's "adultery," Balin's tragedy, the tragedy of the seemingly good knight who nevertheless makes the very worst mistakes, is only where the thinking should begin.

Contingency has its place in that thinking, and in the *Morte Darthur*. Mann is not exactly wrong to say that "the pattern of destiny is formed (as Boethius tells us it is) by chance" (86), but she tellingly excludes Boethius's conclusion—and this is arguably the problem to which the whole *Consolation of Philosophy* is addressed—that this must be, without an accompanying sense of a providence behind the "pattern," an obvious cause for despair.[26] Mann's reading, like Mitchell's, is strongly ideological, so determined to find a deep determinism in Malory that it will not settle for the real tragedy of the Balin story, and of the Arthur story as a whole, which in fact depends on a sense of free agents seeming to do their best but ending up, not entirely but still fatally, in the wrong.[27] Mann and Mitchell's reading, on the other hand, recalls the way one of Chaucer's would-be alchemists insists that "Us moste putte oure good in aventure" (VIII.946), "construing time as modular . . . rather than gradual and causal" and "encoding the idea of futurity ("aventure," from *adventura*, "about to happen") in his very lexis of for-tune" (Johnson,

[26] This is implicit in Lady Philosophy's reproach of the prisoner's provisional embrace of Fortune, in Book II, pr.1, 40: "But if [Fortune] cannot be held fast by your willing it, and makes those she flees from miserable, what is this fleeting goddess but a sure sign of misery to come?" ("Quos si nec ex arbitrio retineri potest et calamitosos fugiens facit, quid est aliud fugax quam futurae quoddam calamitatis indicium?") (176-9). This text and translation are from the Loeb edition of *De consolatione philosophiae*, cited in my Works Cited below.

[27] For a strong argument for the role of the will's evil inclinations in Malory, see Christopher Cannon's "Malory's Crime: Chivalric Identity and the Evil Will." Cannon concludes that "it is not an arbitrary and random evil that destroys Arthur's kingdom but an arbitrary good fortune that – at least for a time – kept lethal forces in check" (182). Though Cannon, somewhat like Mann, tends to overemphasize the role of arbitrary chance in the *Morte*, his stress on the way an evil will is at work even in Malory's best knights represents a helpful corrective to her position. For a more direct refutation of Mann, see Marilyn Corrie, "Self Determination in the Post-Vulgate *Suite Du Merlin* and Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*."

Practicing Literary Theory 148), disavowing agency in the present. This is an idea of "aventure" that fetishizes fate and the *futura*, collapsing fate into chance, whatever the future may bring. Facing up to the worry of contingency—as a real worry, rather than as a cause for celebrating the being "touched by events" that is the death of Balin and his brother—means allowing for the possibilities of providence and of freedom, and so asking how it is that Balin gets himself into a "contingent and agonistic realm" all his own, far from Bakhtin's world of "miraculous chance" and also from the more balanced Bernardine simplicity of the unburdened, un-presumptuous will. Mitchell asserts that "the sources of [Balin's] corruption" are "diffuse in the narrative" (127), and leaves it at that; Malory relentlessly worries over, without ever simplifying, those sources. This, and not any split between self and destiny, is the real fascination of what Mann foregrounds in her treatment of Malory's "Book of Balin": Balin really is so good,[28] and his fate really is so bad. But what if—Malory is always asking, in the tale of Balin and elsewhere—the two are not unrelated, but are in fact both necessary ways of describing, and of explaining, one and the same person? What if the essential split is not between Balin and his destiny, much less a supposedly contingent world and a miraculous one, but between Balin and himself? And what if Balin were really free?

When, at the start of the Balin story, King Arthur offers to try to unsheathe the miraculous sword that has been brought to his court, he is careful to qualify the grounds for his attempt: "I woll assay myselffe to draw oute the swede, nat presumynge myselff that I am the beste knyght; but . . . in gyvyng an insample to all the barownes, that they shall assay everych one" (62). Arthur explicitly disavows presumption—the result, for St. Bernard, of letting a

[28] Balin is described as a "good man named of his body," and the damsel who brought the sword to the court says he's the best knight she's found on her long journeying (63). It is therefore too simple to suggest that Balin straightforwardly deserves his fate.

falsely autonomous self-image displace the soul's natural, un-presumptuous state of simplicity. Simplicity is in fact a distinguishing mark of Arthur, the notably naive warrior-king who draws the sword from the stone only because he cannot bear to have his brother Kay without one; his activity as King is, in general, remarkably passive, as can be seen most clearly in his simply refusing to deal with the issue of the Queen and Lancelot's increasingly public adultery. The question of how this simplicity is lost, and how it might be regained, hovers over the *Morte*, and especially over the way Malory makes use of the term "aventure" throughout. Mann describes "taking the adventure" in Malory as "a strange combination of activity and passivity" ("Taking the Adventure" 79). In her reading, when Balin draws the sword at court and so accepts the destiny that comes with it, he invites the "adventure" of contingency that is in any case his fate, embracing this mysterious combination. Although I strongly disagree with the idea that Balin's particular way of "taking the adventure" should be understood as his getting the balance between activity and passivity right, these are nonetheless helpful terms—understood with reference to the dangers of Bernardine "presumption" and "despair," but also with reference to Malory's own key terms "worship" and "shame"—for interrogating the decisions made by the adventurous knights in Malory, and for understanding the way they relate to the Bernardine schema.[29]

An interrogation of Balin's actions in particular requires close analysis of how Malory uses that word "adventure" throughout the *Morte Darthur*, and so demands a less abstract look at the word's use than that which was offered in the first section of this chapter. What I take to be the crucially chivalric, romance use of the word, a use consonant with the definitions offered by both Auerbach and Bakhtin, can be seen at work in the beginning of "A Noble Tale of Sir

[29] In his recent book-length study of the role of agency and intention in Chaucer, John Bugbee has argued that Bernard's "mystical theory of action" involves an important balance of activity and passivity in the human will's relation to God (137).

Launcelot du Lake," the third tale of the *Morte Darthur*. By the time this tale begins, "arms and worship that passed all other of her fellowys in prouesse and noble dedys" have already been "proved on" Lancelot "in especiall"; but all this is described as only "play and game" next to Lancelot's resolve "hymself to preve in straunge adventures." Thinking to prove himself in this way, Lancelot "bade his nevew, sir Lyonell, for to make hym redy, 'for we must go seke adventures.' So they mounted on their horses, armed at all ryghtes, and rode into a depe foreste and so into a playne" (253). There is something about the real risks of adventure, the willed vulnerability and "active passivity" of riding into a "depe foreste," that seems to the only way for a knight to really "preve" himself, to know himself and to show to others his own identity, no matter how much greatness is "proved on him" by way of his more actively demonstrated prowess at court. As Bakhtin observed, "by his very nature" the "hero of a chivalric romance . . . can live only in this world of miraculous chance"—this world of adventure—"for only it preserves his identity" (152). This tangle of activity and passivity in the person of Lancelot already suggests that "self and destiny" are much more intertwined in Malory than Mann tends to admit: Lancelot, at least, trusts that the adventure he takes will really "prove" himself, will make his essence known to himself and others. He trusts, in other words, that his destiny, however adventurously unpredictable, is genuinely self-disclosing and in no way arbitrary.

The word "aventure" in Malory in fact serves as a sort of battleground for meaning, a site where Malory works through his own ideas on contingency and providence, activity and passivity, rather than a mere fixed term that always refers to arbitrary "chance." Though Mann seems drawn to the idea that knights may be defined by their adventures—she allows that the adventure of the sword alone really may say something about Balin's most essential selfhood—she glosses over the possibility that "adventure" might mean anything like a definitive, identity-

conferring "miraculous chance," preferring to de-theologize both "adventure" and "grace" at the outset of her study. She glosses these two words, respectively, as "fortune" and "good fortune," as if there were no other nuances available; the fifth Middle English Dictionary entry for "aventure"—which, like the first, cites Malory for one of its references, and which reads, "A marvelous thing (action, occurrence), a wonder, a miracle"—is apparently forgotten (5). My purpose here is not so much to re-theologize the word, as to suggest that Malory uses the word "aventure" in several ways, some of them with an importantly theological dimension. The first MED entry for "aventure" in fact offers a choice between "fate," "fortune," and "chance," presenting the interpreter with the difficulty of deciding whether or not to see the mechanism that sets events in motion as an active, intentional force in the adventuring process. The choice between these definitions is a choice not only of words but of entire world-views: Do we choose "fate," with its implications of some guiding force, providential or not, behind the "aventure" the knight is presented with? Do we choose "fortune," with its sense of a guiding force that is nonetheless somehow importantly arbitrary? Or do we choose "chance," which would seem to deny any agency or even intelligible order to events?

Posing these questions makes it easier to spot subtleties in phrasing that seem native to Malory's habitual way of thinking. Take Mann's titular "taking the adventure" phrase, which is nearly unique to the Balin story and so which is, I believe, critical for understanding what makes him so important to the *Morte Darthur* as a whole. The phrase itself first occurs when the damsel who gives Balin his second sword, supposedly destined for the best knight in the world, asks for it back. Balin answers, "I shall take the aventure . . . that God woll ordayne for me. But the swerde ye shall nat have at thys tyme, by the feythe of my body!" (64). Against Mann's more one-sided reading of the term, it is in my view important to read each use of the phrase "taking

the adventure" in relation to the different ways "adventure" is used throughout the whole *Morte Darthur*. Considered alongside more typical uses like Lancelot's breezy "we must go seke adventures" (253), "taking the adventure" starts to look in fact like an especially active, assertive phrase; "seeking" and "taking" clearly signify two very different ways of disposing oneself toward the event in question. This more contextual reading of the term makes it clear that Balin is emphatically not submitting to sheer chance, but rather asserting that he will submit to any chance, any "aventure," that means he gets to keep the sword—a sword that, we are told, "pleased hym muche" when he first drew it from its scabbard and eagerly "loked on" it (63). According to the MED, the specific phrase Balin uses means something like "to take (one's) chances" (1b)—a phrase that in fact communicates, in modern English, a sense of presumptuous self-confidence. It is safe to assume that it communicates something of the same sense in Malory's Middle English as well.

The second use in the tale of the phrase "taking the adventure" comes after Balin has witnessed the suicide of the lady Columbe, another test in activity and passivity that he seems once again to decisively fail. Having just dispatched Launceor, Columbe's lover, Balin attempts to take Launceor's sword out of Columbe's would-be suicidal hand, but stops when he realizes that "he myght nat take hit oute of hir honde but yf he shold have hurt hir." All of a sudden, as Balin looks on, Columbe sets the pommel on the ground and falls on her sword, leaving Balin "hevy" and "ashamed that so fayre a damesell had destroyed hirselff for the love of hys dethe" (69). Merlin, a generally reliable judge and prophet in the "Tale of King Arthur," blames Balin at once—"thou haste done thyselff grete hurte that thou saved nat thys lady that slew herselff; for thou myghtyst have saved hir and thou hadist wold" (71)—and even credits this event with causing the later "Dolorous Stroke," which will institute the Waste Land and hurry Balin on to

his eventual fate in double-fratricide. If Merlin is right, Balin's problem in the particular case of Columbe's suicide is something like a kind of practical determinism or over-passivity; he could have prevented the death if he "hadist wold," but he acted as if he could not do so. At Arthur's court he had pretended that taking the sword from the lady over her objections was a matter of providential necessity—"I shall take the aventure . . . that God woll ordayne"—but here he pretends, effectively if not explicitly, the reverse: that taking the sword from Columbe would be an impossibility, despite the immediately and obviously disproportional nature of the "hurt" to which this inactivity swiftly leads. As a Bernardine framework makes clear, the choices are not so different as they might seem: Balin chooses, again, to act as if he has no choice, and so draws tighter the knot of arrogant overactivity and ashamed inaction—of presumption and despair, in other words—around him. He then flees the scene, unable to bear the sight of the dead couple, and immediately meets with his brother Balan, previously unmentioned in the tale. When Balin informs Balan that he has beheaded the Lady of the Lake in Arthur's court, killed the knight Launceor that was sent by Arthur to pursue him, and stood idly by at the lady Columbe's suicide, Balan admits that these events grieve him, too, but there is nothing to be done; "ye must take the adventure that God woll ordayne you" (70). By now the dynamic of over-activity and -passivity has so solidified around Balin that this perhaps even rings true; in a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, the knight now inhabits the deterministic world he first hypothesized for himself. There is nothing left to do but watch his own tragedy unravel.

The appearance of Balan at just this point in the story seems to mark the end of the period in which Balin has real agency; no longer will anyone suggest that he could have really done otherwise. Some readers have taken a psychoanalytical approach to the uncanny apparition of

this parroting brother;[30] but if we examine it in terms of St. Bernard's own psychologically acute theological framework, we can approach that doubling, and its attendant sense of strangeness, from a direction that is probably more germane to Malory's own thought. In Bernard's "realm of unlikeness" the naturally simple soul curves away from its simple identity in God, and so is inevitably split, or doubled; it is exiled from itself and from its deepest identity, which can only consist in willing nothing other than what God wills—and certainly not in willing to keep a self-defining sword, and identifying that stubborn self-will itself with the will of God. In his forty-second sermon *De diversis* Bernard writes, "The first realm is the realm of unlikeness. That noble creature, made in the realm of likeness, made in fact in the image of God, when he was in honor, did not understand this, and so descended from likeness into unlikeness. A great unlikeness indeed, from heaven to hell, from angel to beast, from God to the devil!" ("Prima regio est regio dissimilitudinis. Nobilis illa creatura in regione similitudinis fabricata, quia ad imaginem Dei facta, cum in honore esset, non intellexit et de similitudine ad dissimilitudinem descendit. Magna prorsus dissimilitudo, de paradiso ad infernum, de angelo ad iumentum, Deo ad diabolum!") (42.2; VI:256). The split that sin engenders, then, is linked by Bernard not just to the diabolical, but also to the beastly, which man "when he was in honor" was so unlike as to be almost angelic; but it is above all a splitting, a ripping asunder of "likeness" into an unlikeness that is, like the relationship between Balin and Balan, defined by doubles: heaven and hell, angel and beast, God and the devil.

The one time Balin and Balan fight together alongside Arthur, we are told that the onlookers "seyde they were sente from hevyn as angels other devilles from helle" (76). The text itself therefore suggests that we should think of the introduction of Balan as the marker of an

[30] In her book *The Genesis of Narrative*, Elizabeth Edwards makes use of the Freudian uncanny and the "doubling" theory of René Girard to capture the sense of strangeness here (41-43).

emergent diabolic duplicity in Balin. Balin has reached, it seems, the point of no return, and is no longer self-possessed enough to act as a free moral agent. From here on out we will be dealing only with consequences, an ineluctable chain of tragedy that really does look something like fate, an "adventure" Balin has taken and cannot take back. Balin's own original "I shall take the aventure" with the sword may be an instance of self-deception—he pretends he cannot do otherwise—but he seems at least to believe himself then. When Columbe dies, he says her death "grevith [him] sore" (70); cast down from selfish arrogance to helplessness, from presumption to despair, he begins to need a doubling brother, a Balan, to reassure him that things really could not have been otherwise. This suggests that even Balin no longer really believes this. The only way at this point in the story for Balin to continue acting as if he were an essentially volition-less, passive agent, only "taking" a pre-determined adventure—and so not paralyzingly responsible for the exponentially fatal effects of his actions—is to summon up a second, supplemental self, which will reassure him that he never had a choice anyway. In short, Balan makes it possible for Balin to continue lying to himself—to become two knights in one, deceiving and self-deceived, diabolically self-justifying.

There can be no doubt, in any case, that Balin's "taking the adventure" seems at once, like a kind of magnet, to draw all kinds of violence, and especially self-harm, to Balin's person. When she sees Launceor dead, Columbe cries out, "A! Balyne, two bodyes thou haste slain in one herte, and two hertes in one body, and two soules thou hast loste" (69), and kills herself; when Merlin tells Balin that he will eventually strike the Dolorous Stroke because of Columbe's death, Balin says this cannot be true, "for and I wyste thou seyde soth, I wolde do so perleous a dede that I wolde sle myself to make the a lyer" (71). Toward the end of his tale, when Balin brings the knight Garnysh to see that Garnysh's lover has taken another lover for her own,

Garnysh kills his lover and her new paramour where they lie, then cries out, "now is my sorou doubel that I may not endure, now have I slayne that I moost loved in al my lyf!" and "sodenly" kills himself (87). Garnysh, like Columbe, decides that he is not himself without his lover, much as Balin decides he is not himself without his sword; but Garnysh goes further than Columbe, deciding his lover cannot be herself without her love for him, and so makes himself a murderer as well as a suicide. There is an implicit meditation here on the self-destructive feedback loop of presumption and despair, and on the related way that a projected sense of incompletion can generate a latently violent misperceived need for another object or person to complete oneself. The tale is full of the disastrous doublings that this false neediness generates, each of which leads to violent and self-destructive action.[31] This applies not just to Balin but to the world of romance itself; everything good in that world is turned inside-out, made unlike itself; "taken" up in acts of presumptuous self-will, at once self-asserting and denying entirely the reality of its own assertion, the miraculous "suddenly" of adventure becomes in the "Tale of Balin" the relentless "now," and "now," and "soddenly" of Garnysh's murder-suicide. The tale might even be conceived, in the way of "imaginative theory," as a deliberate representation and dramatization of the romance genre's seamy underside, its latent inability to deal with complex ethical agency and the ramifying consequences of one's own supposedly "miraculous," in fact self-chosen adventures.

The third and final use of the phrase "taking the adventure" in the tale lacks the misplaced invocations of providence that are present in the first two, and is still more catastrophic. It comes just after Balin has exchanged his own shield for a larger one on a whim,

[31] Kierkegaard's *The Sickness Unto Death* makes a similar point about the self's being either in despair wanting to be itself, or in despair, wanting not to be itself. The former I would identify roughly with Bernardine presumption; the latter, with despair.

ensuring that he will not be recognized by his brother and so setting his own and his brother's eventual deaths in motion. Balin is warned that he is in great danger, "for by [his] sheld [he] shold have ben knowen." He replies, "Me repenteth . . . that ever I cam within this countrey; but I maye not torne now ageyne for shame, and what aventure shalle falle to me, be it lyf or dethe, I wille take the adventure that shalle come to me" (89). The invocation of God is missing here not necessarily because Balin's misadventures have convinced him that everything is chance after all—he will ask for and receive last rites for himself and his brother as they die—but, more likely, because Balin himself can no longer pretend that providence is the only force at work, or use providence as a means of self-justification anymore; he is too utterly despairing now for that. It is no good pretending to be one of Mann's de-psychologized knights now, unsullied by Bernardine duplicity; he can feel that he has lost the knack. Balin has begun to perceive that he has been caught, to use a metaphor written into the text, like a beast in a trap; but the trap is the same as it has been all along, and he is still walking into it. "Shame," a negative manifestation of the same proud inflexibility that led Balin to "take the adventure" in the first place, prohibits him from taking any action to reverse the destructive direction of events. Here we see "shame" playing the merely negative role that St. Bernard warns against, a role it will assume with great force in the last books of the *Morte Darthur*, where nearly every one of the Round Table's best knights is described as acting out of shame, and so ensuring their own destruction. This "shame" is, I propose, the shame of despair, the shame that is both unwilling to reconcile the precious self-image with the facts of the self's situation, and unable to offer up a positive sense of self-worth strong enough to override this paralyzing sense of its own inadequacy. It is not to be confused with the productive "shame" of contrition, which depends in the Bernardine scheme on

the just fear of God, and which might lead to repentance or even to something like conversion; it is precisely to "torne now ageyne" that has become, for Balin, unthinkable.

The "Book of Balin" plots the movement from presumption to despair, completing a narrative arc that runs, to use the terms of more contemporary theology, from voluntarism to determinism, over-activity to over-passivity. In the end Balin is, in Bernard's terms, completely unaware of his own value; the question of "lyf or dethe" has become immaterial to him, and he is unable to perceive himself as having any choice between them. The self-assertiveness of "taking the aventure" is shown, step by inexorable step, to be the same as not wanting to be oneself at all: Balin's previous assertion that he would "sle [himself] to make [Merlin] a liar"—would slay himself if he found out he was a certain kind of person with a certain kind of fate, in other words, rather than deal with the consequences—is brought to its logical conclusion in a complete devaluation of his own life, and in the strange claim, as he nears his death, that "my hert is not wery. I wold be fayne ther my deth shold be" (88). Here Balin cannot even see the heart-weariness of wishing to die, and he can repent only "that ever I cam within this countrey." His idea that the place itself is cursed represents, I would suggest, a faint romance echo of Bernard's Augustinian "regio dissimilitudinis," with its strong sense of fallen mankind as an exile in a realm that, through sin, comes to look increasingly alien and hostile. Completely dislocated, the person adrift in the Bernardine "realm of unlikeness" is as likely to kill his or her brother as to fight alongside him. When Balin comes to a sign of the cross set up in the road just before the place where he will die, he "herd an horne blowe as it had ben the dethe of a best" (88). The scene's sense of unnatural solitude, and of a cursed country, gives way to Balin's single glimmer of self-understanding in the tale: "'That blast,' said Balyn, 'is blowen for me, for I am the pryse, and yet am I not dede'" (88). This is man in living death, the beast who cannot die, its natural

simplicity lost but its immortality nagging, the image of God defaced but still able to sense something of this defacement. As Bernard put it:

> Placed in honor, man did not understand that he was mud, being charmed by the height of that honor; and straightaway he experienced in himself what, some time later, a man from among the sons of captivity prudently observed, and truly propounded, saying: "Whoever thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, deceives himself". . . .Hence an extraordinary creature was mixed in with the herd, hence the likeness of God was changed into the likeness of a beast.
>
> ("Positus in honore, non intellexit quod limus esset, honoris fastigio delectatus; et continuo in se expertus est quod tanto post tempore homo de filiis captivitatis et prudenter advertit et veraciter protulit, dicens: Qui se putat aliquid esse, cum nihil sit, ipse se seducit. . . .Hinc egregia creatura gregi admixta est, hinc bestiali similitudine Dei similitudo mutata est.") (35.6; I:253)

Like the stations of the cross, Malory's "Book of Balin" charts every stage on this despairing itinerary.

"Making Good": Lancelot *ad imaginem Dei* in "The Healing of Sir Urry"

Merlin comes into the "countrey" of Balin and Balan's death the morning after their burial. There he makes his last active contribution to the fate of the Round Table: recasting Balin's sword. Merlin fits the sword with a new pommel, asks a knight standing by to try and pick it up, then laughs when the knight cannot. He explains his laugh, declaring, "Thys ys the cause . . . there shall never man have thys swerde but the beste knyght of the worlde, and that shall be sir Launcelot other ellis Galahad, hys sonne. And Lancelot with thys swerde shall sle the

man in the worlde that he lovith beste: that shall be sir Gawayne" (58). Malory has significantly recast his source here. He adds "other ellis Galahad, hys sonne" to the prophecy from the *Suite du Merlin*, cementing the link between the end of the Balin story and the commencement of the Grail Quest. Still more significantly, he combines two swords into one. Where the *Suite* has Merlin take a second sword—Balin's second sword, or perhaps Balan's—and fix it in a floating stone meant expressly for Galahad, Malory collapses the two; it is now one and the same sword that is meant both to aid Galahad in initiating the Grail Quest, and to be used by Lancelot in the confrontation that will mark the final disintegration of the Round Table fellowship.

Vinaver reads this conflation as evidence that Malory did not understand the symbolism of the two swords in the first place. According to Vinaver, the *Suite* author meant them to represent, respectively, the "dark forces of destiny which cause the tragic deaths of Balin and Gawain" in the case of the sword meant for Lancelot, and the "light of salvation and redemption which is brought to the kingdom of Logres by Galahad and by Galahad alone" in the case of the sword meant for Lancelot's perfectly pure son ("Introduction" xlvii). Vinaver does not even entertain the possibility that Malory's combination may have been purposeful. Reacting against this reading, Robert L. Kelly has more recently argued that "Malory's change was designed to shift the focus from Balin as a type of Lancelot (as slayer of one's best friend) to Balin as a type of the redeemer figure, Galahad" ("Malory's 'Tale of Balin'" 98). But the principle effect of Malory's making the two swords into one is one that Vinaver's reading in fact brings out more clearly: Malory collapses two seemingly opposite symbolisms into one. Malory's Merlin does not really give us a choice between "Balin as a type of Lancelot" and "Balin as a type of the redeemer figure"; both are kept in focus, carved into the pommel of the same sword. Neither does Malory give us Vinaver's choice between the "dark forces of destiny" and the "light of

salvation"; both are in play, in some mysterious way, in the same material symbol that winds its way from the *Morte Darthur*'s beginning all the way to its end.

Elsewhere Vinaver describes the importance of romance's analogical method of "interlace," the repetition and evolution of signs that gives the romance genre its sense of interconnectedness and inevitability. This is the method that makes a mysterious hand both give Excalibur to Arthur and take it back from him again; Vinaver describes it, following Dante, in terms of "melodies answering each other" (*The Rise of Romance* 122). The *Queste del Saint Graal* bends this figural texture in a more typological direction that makes it, if not an alternative to Scripture, at least an imitation of the way Scripture can insist both on the symbolic, irreducible importance of its literal events and historical characters and on the importance of the way those events and characters interlock with each other over time.[32] This method allows the spiritualizing *Queste* author to supplant Lancelot without simply discarding him; Galahad is the melody that answers Lancelot, but Lancelot is the melody that calls forth Galahad's answer: "In you is my beginning." The son completes the father's quest, but the father has brought forth the son. In the *Queste*, Galahad is the final fruit of the Round Table and also its end; but he is an end that gives new meaning to all that came before, an ending that does justice to the story in that it could not have come about without the story's many imperfect particulars—Galahad is, after all,

[32] I am thinking here of Auerbach's essay "Figura," and of "the idea that earthly life is thoroughly real, with the reality of the flesh into which the Logos entered, but that with all its reality it is only *umbra* and *figura* of the authentic, future, ultimate truth, the real reality that will unveil and preserve the *figura*." Auerbach calls this "the dominant view in the European Middle Ages." This is perhaps true of works in a more monastic vein like the *Queste del Saint Graal*, but I am not sure it is true of Chaucer, Langland, or Malory. I am not even sure it is true of Bernard. The question of where different authors put the accent on "real reality" seems to me fraught and fascinating. Auerbach himself admits that this view was "in constant conflict with purely spiritualist and Neoplatonic tendencies" in the Middle Ages (72). He identifies these tendencies with "the so-called symbolical or mythical forms" whose "characteristic feature is that the thing represented must always be something very important and holy for those concerned, something affecting their whole life and thinking"; "this something is not only expressed or imitated in the sign or symbol, but considered to be itself present and contained in it" (56-7). Is Lancelot figural? Is the Host, or Nede? Is the eucharist? Chenu's discussion of Pseudo-Dionysian symbolism, mentioned above, is a good corrective for this. I have also cited M.B. Pranger on the way Bernard escapes Auerbach's analysis in my Introduction.

Lancelot's illegitimate child. The meeting of Lancelot and Galahad is the closing of a circle, but it is also the beginning of an ascent upward and a movement forward in which Lancelot himself still participates.

Malory adopts and radicalizes the *Queste* author's both symbolical and typological approach, insisting more strongly than the *Queste* author does on this element of participation and interdependence. The uniqueness of Malory's symbolic imagination can be summarized neatly in the fact of Merlin's stubbornly single sword—a resistance to easy demarcations and distinctions that would, to return to Helen Cooper's phrase, put "an end to thought, just at the point where thinking ought to start." This is why it is worth insisting on the relevance of Bernard's emphasis on human duplicity and simplicity, and of Bernard's further strong assertion that simplicity is native to the soul and can always be recovered. A simple split in the self—an insurmountable split between its Galahads and its Balins—would be too easy for Malory, just as it is too easy for the restlessness of Bernard, who wrote of God in the *Sermones super cantica canticorum*, "I expect that not even when He has been found will He cease having to be sought" ("Existimo quia, nec cum inventus fuerit, cessabitur a quaerendo") (84.1; II:303). As Bernard writes in the eighty-second of the *Sermones*, "what Scripture says—"made of unlikeness"—it says not because the likeness is destroyed, but because another has been superadded. . . .That is: 'Their foolish heart has been darkened,' says the Apostle; and the Prophet: 'How has the gold been darkened, and the best color changed?' He laments that the gold has been darkened, but it is gold nevertheless" ("quod Scriptura loquitur de dissimilitudine facta, non quia similitudo ista deleta sit loquitur, sed quia alia superducta. . . .Denique Obscuratum est insipiens cor illorum, Apostolus ait; et Propheta: Quomodo obscuratum est aurum, mutatus est color optimus? Obscuratum aurum plangit, sed aurum tamen") (82.2; II:293). The "dissimilitudo" here is not the

sign of a natural split in the soul, but a "superadded" impurity. For Bernard, it is the "aurum" of simplicity that is natural; and this always must be affirmed, just as the obscuring work of duplicity must never be denied. Similarly, Merlin's engraving on Balin's sword does nothing to downplay the eruption of self-harm, the great "pité," of Balin's destructive "dissimilitudo." Merlin's actions mimic what Malory's whole *Morte Darthur* tends to do: it yokes the worst, most apparently contingent moments together with the best and most obviously providential, and the best of humanity with the worst of it. Here and elsewhere, Malory balances his awareness of the "regio dissimilitudinis" and the duplicity of the soul with a re-affirmation of the soul's essential simplicity, and so with what Mann herself describes as a "yearning for that which negates separation, for 'wholeness' – both the wholeness of the individual person, and the wholeness of the Round Table fellowship" ("Knightly Combat" 32). This is one of the deepest notes in Malory, and one that cannot be fully understood without something like the theological context of Bernardine "simplicity" and the danger of presumption.

The problem of the soul's uneasy balance of simplicity and duplicity is played out most clearly in the person of Lancelot. Lancelot is too large a figure for any single reading or study, and I will discuss in detail only a small portion of his story: that portion in which he is most clearly a kind of foil for, and even a figure and fulfillment of, Balin. Kelly discusses Lancelot as a type of Balin in terms of Lancelot's killing Gareth, a brother-figure for Lancelot and so himself a kind of Balan, doomed to demonstrate Lancelot's duplicity and its fatal consequences. This overlap is important, but the carefulness with which Malory contrasts the two figures is largely ignored by Kelly, and has been less well described in the criticism. I should be clear at the outset that I do not mean by "contrast" simply to distance Lancelot from Balin, in hopes of clarifying that the latter is hopelessly sinful and the former really alright in the end; I am reading the tales a

more symbolical plane than that. I mean rather to contrast what Malory says about the soul by way of the two characters, and to suggest that the statements that are made in and through the stories of Balin and Lancelot are not exclusive but in fact co-dependent, a kind of typological call and response that together make up a rich, and richly Bernardine, vision of the soul as suspended between simplicity and duplicity, the image of God and its "superadded" sinfulness. This contrast is most evident in the scene called "The Healing of Sir Urry," which is still believed to be Malory's invention—at best "partial analogues" have been suggested (Norris 136)—and which I believe to have been invented as an answer to questions raised by the stories of Balin and of Lancelot as Malory found them in his sources.

The beginning of "The Healing of Sir Urry" is remarkably similar to the beginning of Malory's "Balin." Sir Urry's mother comes to Arthur's court looking for help for her son, an "adventurys knight" who has slain the earl of Spain's son Alpheus and so brought down the wrath of Alpheus's mother, a sorceress, on his head. The sorceress has cursed Urry so that the seven wounds Alpheus gave him remain, and so that he "shulde never be hole untyll the beste knyght of the worlde had serched hys woundis" (1145). The lady who bore Balin's sword had already been to the court of Arthur's adversary King Royns, but Urry's mother has been much farther; she has "passed all the londis crystynde thorow to have hym healed. . . .And that ys grete pité, for he was a good knyght of grete nobeles" (1146). Her description of her son directly recalls what Galahad says about Balin when he takes up Balin's sword: "with thys swerde [Balin] slew hys brothir Balan, and that was great pité, for he was a good knight" (863). More striking still, Arthur's response to this lady's request echoes his response to the lady who bore Balin's sword almost word-for-word. Beginning the test of Balin's sword, Arthur offered to try to unsheathe the sword first, saying, "I woll assay myselffe to draw oute the swede, nat

presumynge myselff that I am the beste knyght; but . . . in gyvyng an insample to all the barownes, that they shall assay everych one" (62). Beginning the healing of Urry, Arthur says again, "I myselff woll asay to handyll your sonne . . . nat presumyng uppon me that I am so worthy to heale youre son be my dedis, but I woll corrayge othir men of worship to do as I woll do" (1146). Not only, then, does the challenge of healing Urry raise again the old fears of the fate of the supposedly "good knight" and of "holeness" that haunted the Balin story—Merlin finishes his prophecy of Balin's Dolorous Stroke, "[Pelleas] shall nat be hole of that wounde many yerys" (72); it also raises these concerns once again under the shadow of presumption, which the above reading identified as the beginning of all Balin's troubles.

Unlike Balin at the time of the test of the sword, Lancelot has dealt with presumption before. In a scene from Malory's "Sankgreal" that I discussed briefly near the beginning of this chapter, Lancelot, "passyng hevy and dismayed" because he cannot find a way into an old chapel with a "fayre awter" inside (893), watches a sick man ride up to the chapel and sees the Holy Grail make the man "hole." Lancelot cannot rise to go to the Grail himself because "he was overtakyn with synne," half awake and half sleeping (894). It is just after this episode that he encounters a white-habited hermit who explains to him the nature of his fault: "And for youre presumpcion to take uppon you in dedely synne for to be in Hys presence, where Hys fleyssh and Hys blood was . . . ye myght nat se hyt" (896). This is one simple but important role that the "Urry" sequence plays in the *Morte Darthur*: it presents a good knight—and an inheritor of Balin's sword—with the test of presumption, and this time he passes. It therefore responds creatively to its source, not disregarding the spiritual lessons of the *Queste* but instead re-incorporating them into the larger Arthurian story around a more actionable ethical lesson. There is no question of Lancelot's offering himself up as the "beste knyght of the world," or arguing, as

Balin argued with the lady bearing the sword, that "manhode and worship ys hyd within a mannes person" (63), and so a knight may be better than he looks. Lancelot knows that part of what is hidden within his person is the potential for sinful presumption, and so he protests to Arthur, "I wolde nat take uppon me to towche that wounded knyght in that entent that I shulde passe all othir knyghtes. Jesu deffende me frome that shame!" It is not that Lancelot is necessarily a better knight than Balin; it is that he has failed before, and has learned from failure.[33] Arthur must explicitly assure Lancelot that he will "nat do hit for no presumpcion, but for to beare us felyshyp" before Lancelot will assent (1151); he must refer Lancelot's actions to a community-centered ethic of "felyshyp" that re-prioritizes the here-and-now over the *Queste*'s more purely spiritual emphasis. Otherwise he would be ashamed even to try.

Though Lancelot's productive fear of the "shame" of being found presumptuous again seems to make the eventual healing possible, there are perhaps other, less strictly noble motives for his demurral. Just before he agrees to try and heal Urry, Lancelot says, "I shame sore with myselff . . . for never was I able in worthynes to do so hyghe a thynge" (1152). This may indicate that he is worried about failing for the simple embarrassment of it, or, worse—as R.M. Lumiansky has argued (229)—that he worries his failure will, in the eyes of the court, confirm the by now widespread rumors of his adultery. One of Malory's most radical rearrangements of sources, his insertion of "The Knight of the Cart" episode just before the "Urry" sequence—probably from the Vulgate *Lancelot*, following a series of episodes all taken from the Vulgate *Mort Artu* or its derivative, the stanzaic *Morte Arthur* (Norris 131)[34]—seems to have been

[33] In this point of emphasis Malory overlaps with, of all people, Langland, whose own stress on the didactic value of failure is almost comically relentless. In a sense "Urry" is Lancelot's "Nede" moment; he has exhausted all his other options, and is finally ready to be "chasted."

[34] Vinaver was so bothered by this re-arrangement that he placed the episode much earlier in the *Morte*, before even the Grail Quest, in his volume of selections from the *Morte Darthur* (McCarthy 88).

designed to remind the reader, and Lancelot himself, of Lancelot's previous duplicity in concealing his relationship with the Queen, and of all the potential "shame" that comes with it. By this point in the story the *Morte Darthur* has demonstrated, and will continue to demonstrate, that shame can be destructively paralyzing; when Balin says he "maye not torne now ageyne for shame" (89) at the end of his story, he shows how the accumulative weight of his misdeeds has made him too "hevy" to move freely, like Lancelot weighed down by his sin as the Grail passes before his eyes. Similarly, in the last real misdeed of the *Morte*, Bedwere will think it "synne and shame to throw away" Excalibur (1239), and so lie repeatedly to Arthur about having thrown it back into the lake.

And yet, for all this, Lancelot's "shame" is what saves him. In the context of the tale, this reflects a powerful sense that shame, much like "fear" in the Bernardine schema, can be harnessed as part of a chronology of lived ethical experience. Malory's distinctive twist on the *Queste*'s figural patterning is to emphasize the freedom of Lancelot's response to his experience in terms of the passing of time; Lancelot "is" his experience over time in much the same way that the Augustinian soul simply "is" its memory, but at the same time it is how he responds to that experience that defines who he is in the end.[35] The passage of time is a major motif in "Lancelot and Guinevere," from its unusually frequent identification of particular feast days—for instance, Urry arrives at Pentecost—to the outburst in favor of "stabylité" in love upon the arrival of the month of May, to Arthur's assurance that Urry will be healed "in good tyme" (1146). There is a clear thematic logic to this: if "Lancelot and Guinevere" is about how Lancelot's experience both

[35] As Rowan Williams puts it, "in a crucial sense (as Augustine says explicitly), memory is what I am. The puzzle is that so much of what I am is absent from conscious awareness. To acknowledge the role of memory is to recognize that 'I' am not a simple history to be unveiled and displayed for inspection, nor a self-transparent reasoning subject." In the "Urry" sequence, Lancelot confronts the fact that he is "inescapably unfinished," "never just 'there'" ("A Question to Myself" 2-3).

reveals and informs his identity, then the experience of "shame" must do its productive work in the passage of time, in narrative. If the soul is naturally upright and simple, shame can make no claim on what is most native to the soul; but it takes time, and shame over time, to recover a simplicity that has been lost. Lancelot's characteristic protest upon the death of Elayne, "I was never causar" (1097), is, in a sense, the excuse his ethical experience should teach him not to make,[36] but in a deep sense he is right. In Bernardine terms, Lancelot does not lose all faith in his own inalienable "aurum"; he is never convinced that there is not something in him worth saving, and so he never quite despairs. And neither, as far as Malory is concerned, should he have: his presumption does prevent him from approaching the Grail as it heals a sick knight in the "Sankgreal," but his recognition of and active disavowal of this presumption—thanks to his experience in time—will make him, in the "Urry" scene, a miraculous healer.[37]

Before healing Urry, Lancelot prays "secretely unto himself" for the power to heal. He explicitly rejects the idea that this power could be, as Bernard put it, "innate in oneself": "Now, Blyssed Fadir and Son and Holy Goste, I beseche The of Thy mercy that my symple worshyp and honesté be saved, and thou Blyssed Trynyté, Thou mayste yeff me power to hele thys syke knyght by the grete vertu and grace of The, but, Good Lorde, never of myself" (1152). Mirroring

[36] As Eleanor Johnson observes of Chaucer's Canon's Yeoman, "Time, like everything else in God's universe, must be caused. . . .By hoping ever to race into the future, alchemists disavow the governing and comforting order of causality that time embodies," rendering themselves "constitutionally unable to receive consolation" (*Practicing Literary Theory* 148). On one level—the *sensus litteralis*—Lancelot's disavowal of causal agency at this point in the narrative does exactly this. If Lancelot has an "omitted victim" in Mann's sense, it is clearly Elaine, whose only sin is to love Lancelot "oute of mesure"—a remark that, as P.J.C. Field notes, is deliberately ambiguous, as it could mean either "immeasurably" or "beyond what the virtue of *mesure* or moderation would allow" ("Time and Elaine" 233). Lancelot's one excuse for not marrying her is that he is not the marrying type, and his relationship with the Queen clearly informs his refusal.

[37] It is provocative, if only to me, that Malory is the first to give Elaine's father the name "sir Barnarde" (Hares-Stryker 216). It is also interesting, in this connection, that Barnarde has two sons, the healthy Lavayne he offers to help Lancelot in the Winchester Tournament and the unwell Tirry whose "straunge armys" almost get Lancelot killed in the joust. Barnarde also begins the pattern, before the later hermit, of asking for Lancelot's name, which Lancelot refuses to give him. The encounter with Elaine and Barnarde's two sons seems designed to capture something about Lancelot's own sense of "radical doubleness," and his duplicitous refusal of self-knowledge.

and reversing his earlier, Balin-esque attempt to disavow his agency, Lancelot enacts a kind of self-emptying here, a learned humility that involves shame of all kinds—fear of sin, fear of embarrassment, and the near-certainty he will fail—that should not be understated. His misgivings are deeply felt and well earned: "Never was I able in worthynes to do so hyghe a thynge" (1152) is not posturing, but the plain truth. He has never been a miracle-worker, and his experience in the Quest for the Grail has taught him that some things are indeed too high for even the best knight in the world. His reliance on grace here therefore comes about only by way of a painful realization that there is nothing else left to rely on, least of all himself. It is in this too, and not just as a healer of Sir Urry, that Lancelot becomes more of an *imago Dei*, emptying himself and taking on the form of a servant.[38] It is this real suspension of certainty, the humbled step out into the unknown and into the uttermost reliance on a "miraculous suddenly" that may not even be miraculous, that gives Malory's original "Healing of Sir Urry" scene its real dramatic force, and contrasts it so distinctly with Balin's way of "taking the adventure." "The Healing of Sir Urry" is an adventure that Lancelot does not even want to take.

It is my view that the whole of "Lancelot and Guinevere" builds carefully toward the drama of the "Urry" scene, which acts as a response to several calls, an answer once and for all about who Lancelot is and even what the *Morte* is, an assertion of providential grace and "miraculous chance" precisely in and through the apparently accidental particulars of Lancelot's experience. Elizabeth Edwards has written that "The healing of Sir Urry does not come by chance, nor is it an accident. . . .Malory suggests an essentialist understanding of the world,

[38] Robert L. Kelly draws attention to the prominence of portrayals of Christ as humble physician in the late Middle Ages ("Wounds, Healing" 179). More attention might be given to the other Christ-like roles Lancelot acts out in the book of "Lancelot and Guinevere": the saving knight in strange arms in "The Poisoned Apple," and even a kind of harrower of hell in "The Knight of the Cart" scene. But the disclosure of Lancelot's essence *ad imaginem Dei* comes about only by way of glancing recognitions of formal roles—most harrowers of hell do not sleep with the damned—and so the question of who Lancelot really is is deferred, I believe, until the "Urry" sequence.

against the grain of story material that stresses the arbitrariness of conventional meanings and the accidental and non-essential relations of signifiers to signified" (*Genesis* 168). In Edwards's view, Malory has inherited this essentialist "view of accident" from the monastic Grail *Queste*, where the wandering called for by romance adventure "may be a necessary delay . . . or it may be a mistake," but contingency in itself can never spell doom for the knight who un-presumptuously "takes the adventure." Edwards sees "Urry" as a counterpoint to the other tales of the book, which portray the encroachment of contingency into the Round Table's world of "miraculous chance," but which represent, for Malory's purposes, little more than a "strategy for delaying the final hour" (173). Though I mostly agree with this, the meticulously crafted "Book of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere," Malory's most deliberate conjunction of sources and original material, deserves close attention as more than a mere "strategy for delaying," and "Urry" in particular demands to be seen as more than an interpolation of ad hoc essentialism.[39] As a close reading of the book's progression will show, it is ultimately a kind of essential accidental, and an ethically-inflected stress on the anagogical weight of experience, that the *Morte Darthur*'s penultimate book proposes.

At the beginning of "Lancelot and Guinevere," Bors urges Lancelot not to flee the court because of a quarrel with the queen: "ye must remembir you what ye ar, and renomed the moste nobelyst knyght of the worlde" (1047). The question of what Lancelot is, in the wake of his half-failure in the Grail Quest and in light of his fall back into mortal sin, is the question that drives "Lancelot and Guinevere," and Malory's sequencing of his sources creates a sense of progression toward an unveiling of Lancelot's essential character. The book itself calls him "a knyght . . . with a straunge shylde, of straunge armys" in his initial encounter with Mador, Guinevere's first

[39] Sue Ellen Holbrook points out that, unlike in some analogues, in the case of Lancelot's healing of Urry "no outcome is predicted" (70).

accuser (1056); when they fight, Lancelot is a bare pronoun, his spear only "the othirs speare" (1057). Before his next adventure, when the Queen urges Lancelot not to disguise himself and joust against the Round Table at Winchester as he means to do, Lancelot answers, in the story's one use of Balin's trademark phrase, "I shall take the adventure that God woll gyff me" (1066). Lancelot presumes on providence in just the way that Balin does, taking only the adventure that allows him to do as he likes; he even asks his host for "a shylde that were nat opynly knowyn," practically begging Balin's fate (1067). And indeed, in the Winchester Tournament, Bors, Lancelot's uncle, lodges his spearhead in Lancelot's side and nearly kills him unwittingly; the threat of Balin's fate for Lancelot hangs over the whole book, and is only narrowly avoided. Lancelot is healed of the wound from Winchester only when the hermit who asks Lavayne "What knyght ys he?" and asks Lancelot, "What knyght ar ye? . . . and where were ye borne?" (1075), recognizes him by a distinctive scar. Lancelot is made whole, then, at least in part because of an old wound; as with the healing that Lancelot himself works in "Urry," it is perhaps not because of Lancelot's sin that the healing is possible, but on a more figurative level the recognition and acknowledgement of a kind of un-wholeness is made a necessary condition of the healing.

With this movement toward answering the question of "what ye ar" in mind, Malory's invention of "The Great Tournament" sequence, at which Lancelot fights wearing Guinevere's sleeve and so is recognized this time by the court, makes good sense: the adulterous love for Guinevere comes closer to the surface, makes more of Lancelot known, just as the joust with Arthur's knights becomes, in its second iteration, one in which Lancelot's disguise is only for show. The decision to recapitulate the same tournament scenario shows Malory carefully emphasizing the progression of the book toward uncovering Lancelot's identity: the repetition

throws the slightest differences—like the difference between wearing Elaine's sleeve to remain unknown at Winchester, and wearing Guinevere's sleeve to make himself known in the "Great Tournament" scene—into sharp relief. Lancelot's answer to the healer-hermit's question "What knyght are ye?" was, "I am a straungere and a knyght aventures that laboureth thorowoute many realmys for to wynne worship" (1075). But Lancelot is dissimulating here, pretending he is a "straungere" in order to hide his identity from the hermit, and the hermit's own knee-jerk exclamation upon recognizing him is one the book is always driving toward: "ye ar the moste nobelyst knight of the worlde. . . .sir Launcelot" (1076).

This progression from "straungere" to "sir Launcelot" also casts light on Malory's insertion of the "The Knight of the Cart" episode after the Great Tournament scene. The specter of Balin still hangs over some of its elements; Lancelot is specifically warned to "turne agayne" as he approaches the castle where Guinevere is lodged (1125). But Lancelot, unlike Balin, has a firm sense of purpose—as always, he needs to save Guinevere—and he affirms himself as "a knyght of the Rounde Table" with a "ryght way" (1125), exhibiting a positive sense of self to which Balin, once he has taken the sword, never again lays claim. Lancelot's final unveiling upon entering the castle under cover of the cart falls little short of the "Sir Urry" sequence in its strong assertion of Lancelot's identity. Lancelot leaps out of the cart and cries, "here I am, sir Launcelot du Lake, that shall fyght with you all!" (1127). That this declaration should be made within the same episode in which Lancelot's adultery is, for the only time in the *Morte Darthur*, described openly, shows the book's structuring schema at its highest pitch. The essential self comes to the surface only so far as the sin does; the uncovering of the wound is the condition of wholeness. Lancelot's "aurum" is uncovered only when the extent to which that gold has been "obscured" is acknowledged head-on.

Somewhat like the chiastic effect achieved at the end of *Piers Plowman*, this narrative logic resonates with the structural idea behind Bernard's *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae* ("*On the Steps of Humility and Pride*"): "if you wish to return to the truth, it is not necessary to seek a new way that you do not know, but the known way by which you descended" ("si ad veritatem redire cupis, non necesse sit viam quaerere novam quam non nosti, sed notam qua descendisti") (X.27; III:37). It is only by acknowledging the "known way by which he descended," and so by retracing his way back through the traps into which he has already fallen, that Lancelot can be made whole again. That wholeness must consist in a full knowledge of the duplicity, the "Balin," in him; and it is felt all the more deeply, when Lancelot finally feels it in "Urry," because of the extreme poles of confident self-assertion and bloody deception that were involved in the "Knight of the Cart" episode that directly precedes it. Balin, Lancelot, and Galahad are, in Malory's *Morte Darthur*, rightly engraved on the same sword: Lancelot works his agonizing way backwards through the "regio dissimilitudinis" of Balin, backwards up the steps of pride that are, going the other direction, the steps of humility. The result is a stunning reversal not so much of fortune, as of Lancelot's understanding of himself and of the world he inhabits. He climbs a very different, much more experience and self-knowledge-oriented ladder of ascent than Galahad's, but the destination—the salvation of Lancelot's soul—is ultimately the same.

Near the beginning of this chapter, I compared Galahad's humbling before Lancelot in the *Queste del Saint Graal* to Father Zosima's bow before Dmitri in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Discussing the similarly humbling kiss that Dostoevsky's Alyosha offers his brother Ivan Karamazov, Rowan Williams writes, "This is simply the reaffirmation of the ultimate presence of creative love within the narrative" (*Dostoevsky* 234). The same might be said of Malory's

"Healing of Sir Urry" sequence. Lancelot's miracle does not cure him of duplicity for good; Malory's final book involves him in all kinds of deception. Neither does the formal relationship between "Urry" and the "Book of Balin" cancel out Balin's fate, which Merlin had carved in stone with gold letters. But Malory's intention was not to cancel out anything; rather, the opposite. Just preceding Lancelot's arrival at court and the actual healing scene, the long list of knights who try to heal Sir Urry affords a recapitulation of the whole story of Arthur. Some knights merely shuffle in and out of the frame. Some, including several not actually present, have their histories recapitulated in miniature. Each knight fails in his turn; they are there really only to anticipate Lancelot and, in doing so, to recast the whole Arthur story as a long, errant quest after wholeness. This vision of communal wholeness that overcomes despair in Malory is, like the Parson's vision of "the body of man, that whilom was foul and derk" glorified in heaven, a vision of immanence lifted up into transcendence, only with the terms flipped around—an earthly goodness that, unlike Galahad's, can be participated in now.

Edwards describes the importance of "recognition" over memory in Malory in a way that accurately describes the movement of the whole patterned penultimate book, with its reiterated emphasis on the passage of time. The *Morte* has a "spatial memory," she says; "It is more accurate to say we recognize formal relations than that we remember them" ("Amnesia and remembrance" 141). Even and especially in the long list of knights in "Urry," the effect is more a recognition of "formal relations" than of what we tend to think of as memory: many of the knights we have simply never heard of before, and several of the more important ones are passed over without comment, only conjuring up whatever faint impress they may have made on our minds before they give way to the names that come after them. Nevertheless we "recognize" even the knights we do not know; they fit into a pattern and suggest a new wholeness in stories

we do not know yet, in turn guaranteeing the real weight of the ones we do. With this weight in hand, what we cannot remember does not trouble us: "If memory is an 'index of loss,' with a correlation between the importance of the loss and the anxious urge to substitute memories, then these texts are not anxious about loss; they accommodate the simplest kind of loss, loss of memory, without apparent concern" (144). This emphasis on "recognition" reverses the tendency of popular Pseudo-Bernardine works like the *Meditationes piissimae* and the *Prick of Conscience* to displace Augustinian memory in favor of the rebarbative book of conscience, a simplified ledger of the sins that calls for interminable reflections on the judgment to come in the anagogical *futura*.[40] Likewise, at just the moment in the *Morte Darthur* when the whole world of Arthurian romance is about to be lost, teetering on the edge of its tragic final book, the affirmation of the presence of creative love at work in the person of Lancelot, and the "recognition" of the *imago Dei* in Lancelot that this presence effects, ends the worry of loss and the danger of despair, the most distinctive late-stage symptom of Balin's original, disastrous presumption. "The Tale of Sir Urry" puts all the worry of un-wholeness on Lancelot, and Lancelot puts all the burden of action on his Creator; and his Creator—his "Auctor," as Bernard sometimes calls Him—acts. But the real moral of the story is that his Creator has already acted. Lancelot is shown to have been created as naturally simple,[41] a child of grace in a metaphor that Malory obliquely gestures toward: after he works his miracle, "ever sir Launcelote wepte, as he

[40] Ivan Illich has argued that in the late Middle Ages "Conscience was conceived as an inner writing, or record, and this idea was reinforced by the appearance in churches of statues of writing devils who note people's sins, and by the image of the Last Judgment as the reading of a book in which all sins are recorded. . . .the primary implication of the idea of a *forum internum* is that the law now governs what is good and bad, not what is legal and illegal. Church law became a norm, whose violation led to condemnation in hell—a fantastic achievement and, I would argue, one of the most interesting forms of perversion of that act of liberation from the law for which the gospel stands" (90).

[41] This is why Kelly's insistence that for Malory "the real and essential Lancelot is the ideal one," and therefore "The Urry episode cannot be understood as part of a pattern of cause-and-effect development," misses the point ("Wounds, Healing" 191). "Urry" is a meditation on the relationship between nature and grace, human simplicity and duplicity, and the ultimate transcendence of these binaries. Kelly's claim that "Malory leaves us with two Lancelots" is therefore too simple.

had bene a chylde that had bene beatyn!" (1152). As Edwards puts it, Lancelot and the court are proved not to have been "disinherited of marvels" (*Genesis* 168); Urry's wounds "can reveal an essential value in the universe" (167). The romance "miraculous suddenly" is affirmed, but this time not as the negation of time and its vicissitudes; it appears to Malory, as it does to Lancelot, as time's ground and guarantor, the very "ground of our beseeching."

Lancelot's reaction to that graceful intimation, his weeping "as he had bene a chylde that had bene beatyn," is one of the most remarkable moments in the whole *Morte Darthur*. To close with a very old critical debate, and an old question about that weeping: Eugène Vinaver says Lancelot cries tears of joy, because he is grateful to have been permitted to work a miracle. C.S. Lewis says Lancelot cries tears of sadness, because he knows his sin will still bring about the end of the Round Table, no matter what miracles he works. It seems to me that it must be at least a little of both, and that the following passage from Bernard's *Sermones super cantica canticorum* captures some of the humbled split, the vertiginous rush of groundlessness and grace "inter spem et desperationem" ("between hope and despair"), at the crux of it:

> For the first likeness remains: and that unlikeness offends all the more, because this likeness remains. O how good the one is, how evil the other! But because they are thrown together, each in its kind stands out more sharply.
>
> When, therefore, the single soul discerns such disparity in itself . . . it is poised between hope and despair. . . .It is dragged into despair by such evil; but it is recalled to hope by such good. Hence it is that, the more displeased it is with the evil it sees in itself, the more ardently it draws itself toward the good it perceives in itself as well, and longs to become again what it was made, simple and upright. . . .Which nevertheless . . . must be undertaken by grace, not by nature and not even by effort. . . .It does not lack grounds

for hope: its turning is to the Word. The dignified kinship of the soul with the Word, which we have been discussing for three days, is not in vain, and its persisting likeness is a witness of that kinship. The Spirit graciously admits into its fellowship whatever is like it by nature. And certainly, by reason of nature, like seeks like.

("Nam manet prima similitudo; et ideo illa [dissimilitudo] plus displicet, quod ista [similitudo] manet. O quantum bonum ista, quantumque malum illa! Ex mutua tamen collatione, utraque res in genere suo plus eminet.

Cum ergo anima tantam in se una rerum distantiam cernit . . . inter spem et desperationem utique posita. . . .Trahitur in desperationem pro tanto malo; sed revocatur in spem a tanto bono. Inde est, ut quo sibi plus displicet in malo, quod in se videt, eo se ardentius ad bonum, quod aeque in se conspicit, trahat, cupiatque fieri ad quod facta est, simplex et recta. . . .Quod tamen . . . de gratia praesumendum, non de natura, sed ne de industria quidem. . . .Nec deest occasio praesumendi: ad Verbum est conversio eius. Non est apud Verbum otiosa animae generosa cognatio, de qua triduo iam tractavimus, et cognationis testis similitudo perseverans. Dignanter admittit in societatem Spiritus similem in natura. Et certe de ratione naturae, similis similem quaerit.") (82.6-7; II:296-7)

In this strange moment of ambiguous promise and inarticulate recognition, Lancelot becomes for a moment what he was made again, simple and upright like a child. Julian of Norwich captures another aspect of this moment even better: "For kindly," she tells us, "the childe dispaireth not of the moders love, kindely the childe presumeth not of itselfe, kindely the childe loveth the moder, and eche one of them other" (321). This settled, childlike trust in God is not something Malory directly depicts in the *Morte Darthur*, but the elaborately patterned "Book of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere" culminates in a moment that opens onto this possibility. In this one scene, if

only then, Malory shows himself to be more than a faithful translator of the *Queste* and ethically invested "fifteenth-century layman." In this one scene, in which Lancelot becomes suddenly a child, "beatyn" by the unforeseeable grace of God, Malory is himself almost a mystic.

In Malory's source in the *Queste del Saint Graal*, before Lancelot comes to his vision of the Grail or Galahad comes to the Grail itself, we are told a story, the "legend of the tree of life," in which the *Queste* author sketches out his whole work's theme. It is, in essence, the scriptural story of Adam and Eve, but its author makes significant additions in line with his monastic preoccupations. There is particular emphasis placed on a branch Eve bears with her as she leaves Eden behind, a branch that is imagined as a sign of great significance:

> The branch that the first sinner brought with her out of Paradise was charged with meaning. In that she held it in her hand it betokened a great happiness, as though she were speaking to her heirs that were to follow her (for she was still a maid), and saying to them through the medium of this twig: "Be not dismayed if we are banished from our inheritance, for it is not lost to us eternally; see here a sign of our return hereafter." (223) ("Cil rains que la premiere pecheresse aporta de paradis fu pleins de mout grant senefiance. Car en ce que ele le portoit en sa main senefoit li une grant leesce, tot ausi come s'ele parlasta ses oirs qui aprés li estoient a venir, car ele ert encore pucele; et li rains senefoit ausi come se ele lor deist: 'Ne vos esmaiez mie se nos somes gité de nostre heritage: car nos ne l'avons mie pedu a toz jorz maiz; veez en ci enseignes que encore i serons nos en aucune seson.'") (212-3)

The "sign" here is dead, cut off. It does not signify by corresponding with anything else. Its significance is itself, and where it comes from. The sign of the branch, somewhat like Lancelot's mysterious weeping, does not directly connect its bearer to what it signifies; but it is a promise

that it signifies something, some original gift still attempting to make contact with us, and that it comes from somewhere to which a "return" might still be possible. As another white-habited hermit cautions the knight who finds it, and as Bernard might have cautioned him too, it is important not to be overwhelmed by the sense of absence that such signs can provoke: "Be not governed in your thinking by despair, but comfort one another, for the tree has more of life in it than death" (225) ("Ne destinex plus nule chose par desesperance, mes confortz li uns l'autre, car plus i a de la vie que de la mort" (214)). If Lancelot learns nothing else in his many adventures, he at least learns this.

Chapter 5

Memorare

Take away Mary, this star of the sea, the sea truly great and wide: what is left but enveloping darkness and the shadow of death and deep shadows?

("Tolle Mariam, hanc maris stellam, maris utique magni et spatiosi: quid nisi caligo involvens, et umbra mortis, ac densissimae tenebrae relinquuntur?")

—Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Nativity of the Blessed Mary*

For Chaucer's Second Nun Bernard is the one who "list so wel to write" of Mary, "thow that flour of virgines art alle" (VIII.29-30), but this dissertation has had almost nothing at all to say about Mary. This aspect of Bernard's work was clearly important for Chaucer, and a study of Bernard's influence on Middle English imaginative literature would be incomplete without some treatment of it. If, as one critic has suggested, this line from the Second Nun's Prologue indicates that Chaucer may have known of Marian writings attributed to Bernard at first hand (Lounsbury 388), there is at least one likely place he might have found them: in the collection of four homilies called *Missus est*, also known as *In Praise of the Blessed Virgin Mary*. A copy of the *Missus est* sermons is preserved in Cambridge Peterhouse MS 219, which, as I indicated in

Chapter Three, has sometimes been associated with Chaucer (Delasanta and Rousseau 320). The sermons were widely circulated in medieval England, and appear to have been more popular there than any of Bernard's homilies besides the *Sermones super cantica canticorum*, including twelve copies recorded in the late thirteenth century Franciscan *Registrum Librorum Anglie* alone (Holdsworth 172). They therefore serve as a good place to start for deciding what the Second Nun might have meant by saying specifically that Bernard wrote "wel" about Mary, and for outlining the significance of Bernardine Marianism in general.[1]

Although, as some critics have pointed out, Bernard does not discuss Mary as frequently as his traditional association with her might suggest (Leclercq, "The School of Cîteaux" 199), even in his own lifetime this association was made by some of his closest friends. In his first book of the saint's *Vita Prima*, Bernard's friend William of St. Thierry tells the story of a young Bernard's encountering Christ in a vision just before the Christmas Vigil, when the "child Jesus" appeared to him "before his very eyes as the wordless Word was being born from his mother's womb," "awakening in him the beginnings of divine contemplation and increasing his tender faith." At this moment, William says, "Bernard was taken out of himself so that his childlike love was transformed." This encounter inspires "a little book in praise of the Mother of God and her son and his Holy Nativity," since "from then on, as he confesses, [Bernard] believed he was at the very moment of the Lord's birth." The account has the ring of authentic secondhand reporting, as William supplies the details of Bernard's enthusiastic recollection: "From those who often listened to him it is obvious that the Lord showered him with blessings at that time, since he has spoken about this mystery more frequently and delved into its meaning more

[1] Bernard's other Marian works include his letter to the Canons of Lyon (Ep. 174; 289-93), his sermon *On the Nativity of the Blessed Mary*, and a series of seven sermons on the Assumption. I will discuss the first two briefly below.

profoundly" (7). Marie-Bernard Saïd describes the collection of *Missus est* sermons—the "little book" that William mentions—as, "Almost alone of all [Bernard's] works," "written not for any practical purpose or to answer to a precise pastoral need, but simply to satisfy the exigencies of their author's personal devotion" (xiii). The account of Bernard's Christmas vision of the child Jesus speaks to the saint's most formative experiences and intimate convictions, and the *Missus est* homilies to his response to them.

There is good reason to believe that the style of the *Missus est* sermons models something important about what Chaucer was struck by in Bernard's Marian writings. The sermons share distinctive stylistic features with the possibly Cistercian *De Maria Magdalena* homily that Chaucer must have admired in his youth, in turn offering us some window into Chaucer's tastes in specifically devotional literature. In particular, the *Missus est* homilies crescendo in sermon four with Bernard's imagining himself present at the scene of the Annunciation, collapsing time around himself as he felt time had collapsed around him when he was a boy on the night of the Christmas Vigil.[2] Like the speaker in *De Maria Magdalena* who projects himself into the past to speak to Mary Magdalene—"So now hear my counsel. The consolation of the angels is enough for you" ("Nunc autem audi consilium meum. Sufficiat tibi angelorum consolacio") (Delasanta and Rousseau 330)[3]—near the end of this final sermon Bernard abruptly enters a register of direct address: "Virgin, you have heard what will happen, you have heard how it will happen" ("Audisti, Virgo, factum, audisti et modum") (4.8; IV:53). He re-stages the moment of

[2] As I noted in Chapter Three, there is in fact a tradition, reproduced in the *Golden Legend*, that identifies the date of the Annunciation with the dates of both the crucifixion and of the creation of the world: March 25, near the spring equinox (Vol. 3, 100). The *Missus est* homilies similarly situate the moment of Annunciation at the center of salvation history: the eternal Word will only be conceived in cooperation with Mary's "fiat," which in turn repeats and verifies the original "fiat lux" of God's creative act.

[3] I have used the edition and translation provided by Rodney K. Delasanta and Constance M. Rousseau in their article "Chaucer's "Orygenes upon the Maudeleyne,'" cited in my Works Cited below. This edition is based on Cambridge Corpus Christi MS 137.

Annunciation and decision, as if he and his listeners were really there and Mary were still deciding:

> The angel is waiting for your reply. . . .We, too, are waiting for this merciful word, my lady, we who are miserably weighed down under a sentence of condemnation. The price of our salvation is being offered to you. If you consent, we shall immediately be set free. We all have been made in the eternal Word of God, and look, we are dying. In your brief reply we shall be restored and so brought back to life.
>
> ("Exspectat Angelus responsum. . . .Exspectamus et nos verbum miserationis, o Domina, quos miserabiliter premit sententia damnationis. Et ecce offertur tibi pretium nostrae salutis: statim liberabimur, si consentis. In sempiterno Dei Verbo facti sumus omnes, et ecce morimur; in tuo brevi responso sumus reficiendi, ut ad vitam revocemur.") (4.8; IV:53)

This passage collapses salvation history down to a single moment of fragile human freedom, marking a present moment of deliberation where eternity and temporality meet: "Only say the word and receive the Word: give yours and conceive God's. Breathe one fleeting word and embrace the everlasting word. . . .In this circumstance, alone, O prudent Virgin, do not fear presumptuousness, for if your reserve pleased by its silence, now much more must your goodness speak" ("Responde verbum et suscipe Verbum: profer tuum et concipe divinum; emitte transitorium et amplectere sempiternum. . . .In hac sola re ne timeas, prudens Virgo, preasumptionem, quia etsi grata in silentio vercundia, magis tamen nunc in verbo pietas necessaria") (4.8; IV:54).[4] At the moment of Mary's "fiat" time and eternity are interwoven, and

[4] It is worth pointing out that another of Bernard's most well-known Marian writings, his letter to the canons of Lyons, protests against the emerging doctrine of the Immaculate Conception on the grounds that it confuses the eternal state of blessedness, of "festivals beyond count," with the current state of earthly "exiles," where the idea of a "retrospective" effect of Mary's purity on "the conception which preceded it" is misleading (Ep. 174.6; 292).

her own word is knit to the eternal Word that is her son. To not "presume" here would be to despair of God's eternal presence. Bernard's rhetoric foregrounds the eternal "presentness" of Mary's decision, attempting to make it present again for his reader.

As the "mediatrix of salvation" between mankind and the man-God Christ (Ep. 174.2; 290), Bernard's Mary makes a renewal of the covenantal Christianity that William J. Courtenay saw as lost in Anselmian theology thinkable again—and in a less esoteric register than the one that was invoked by the fourteenth-century *moderni*. Mary herself will seal the covenant; the "price of salvation" has already been "offered" to her, and she has accepted, winning the Second Nun's sons of Eve back from their exile (VIII.62). Mary has in a sense already "returned" what was "owed," bypassing the anxieties that mark in their different ways *Piers Plowman*, the *Prick of Conscience*, and the Pseudo-Bernardine *Meditationes piissimae*. This is spelled out more clearly in Bernard's sermon *On the Nativity of the Blessed Mary* when he asks, "But perhaps you fear the divine majesty in him, because although he became man, yet he remained God. Do you wish to have an advocate with him? Have recourse to Mary" ("Sed forsitan et in ipso maiestatem vereare divinam, quod, licet factus sit homo, manserit tamen Deus. Advocatum habere vis et ad ipsum? Ad Mariam recurre") (7; V:279). This recommendation is implicit already in Bernard's prayer at the end of the *Missus est* homilies, where the saint ventriloquizes Mary in a way that both encapsulates some of the distinctive emphases of Bernardine theology and also prefigures some of its later literary incarnations:

> "Let it be to me according to your word." Let it be to me concerning the Word according to your word. May the Word who in the beginning was with God, become flesh of my flesh, according to your word. I beg that the Word be to me, not [a word] that once

Bernard dubs it a "dangerous presumption" to think in this way (Ep. 174.1; 290). His emphasis here is on maintaining the tension between the exiled, "pilgrim" present and the eternal, eschatological state of the *futura*.

pronounced fades away, but that conceived remains, clothed with flesh and not with air. Let it be to me, [a Word] not only audible to the ear, but visible to the eyes, one that hands can touch and arms carry. And let it not be to me a written and mute word, but one incarnate and living, that is to say, not [a word] scratched by dumb signs on dead skins, but one in human form, vividly impressed in my chaste womb, not by the tracings of a dead pen, but by the workings of the Holy Spirit. Let it be to me as it has never been to any person before me and will be to no one after me. . . .I do not want it to be a word proclaimed to me in discourse, symbolized in figures, or dreamed in the imagination, but one silently inspired, personally incarnate, corporally inviscerate. May the Word that could not, and had no need to, be made in himself, deign to be in me, deign to be to me according to your word. Let it be for the whole world, but let it be to me uniquely "according to your word."

("Fiat, inquiens, Mihi secundum verbum tuum. Fiat mihi de Verbo secundum verbum tuum. Verbum, quod erat in principio apud Deum, fiat caro de carne mea secundum verbum tuum. Fiat, obsecro, mihi Verbum, non prolatum quod transeat, sed conceptum ut maneat, carne videlicet indutum, non aere. Fiat mihi non tantum audibile auribus, sed et visibile oculis, palpabile manibus, gestabile humeris. Nec fiat mihi verbum scriptum et mutum, sed incarnatum et vivum, hoc est non mutis figuris, mortuis in pellibus exaratum, sed in forma humana meis castis visceribus vivaciter impressum, et hoc non mortui calami depictione, sed Spiritus Sancti operatione. Eo vidilicet modo fiat mihi, quo nemini ante me factum est, nemini post me faciendum. . . .Nolo ut fiat mihi aut declamatorie praedicatum, aut figuraliter significatum, aut imaginatorie somniatum, sed silenter inspiratum, personaliter incarnatum, corporaliter invisceratum. Verbum igitur, quod in se

nec poterat fieri, nec indigebat, dignetur in me, dignetur et mihi fieri secundum verbum tuum. Fiat quidem generaliter omni mundo, sed specialiter Fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum.") (4.11; IV:57)

This striking "inculcation" of Bernard's own words with Mary's condenses many of the themes I have touched on in this study: the saint's emphasis on the "incarnate and living" presence of God, "corporally invisicerate" or, as Julia Kristeva describes Bernard's Christianity, "this passion of the body wrenching itself—which is called love" (166); what I might term Bernard's anagogical "presentism,"[5] where the eternal overlaps with time in the stance of prayerful longing, the noonday vision of Christ's face shimmering into focus at moments of great rhetorical strain and sudden contemplative rapture; and, perhaps most strikingly, even something like a Bernardine "individualism," since Mary asks that it be to her as it has "never been to any person before me and will be to no one after me," "to me uniquely." If this was written originally to emphasize Mary's unique place in the history of salvation, it also opens up a window onto one of Bernard's most innovative themes: the uniquely "personal experience" of each soul with the Word, and the "visible" word, "that hands can touch and arms can carry," that emerges from this

[5] The third sermon on the *Song of Songs* begins, "Today we read in the book of experience" ("Hodie legimus in libro experientiae") (1; I:14). Bernard's first sermon for Advent, placed at the very beginning of his liturgical *Sermones per annum*, begins, "Today, brothers, we celebrate the beginning of advent" ("Hodie, fratres, adventus initium celebramus") (1; IV:161). M.B. Pranger discusses Bernard's "hodie" ("today") in terms of the figure of the "verbum abbreviatum" ("abbreviated word") that Bernard uses to capture the unfathomable smallness of God in the Incarnation, especially as he arrives on earth as a child. Pranger calls this Bernard's "paradisiacal geometry" (*Bernard of Clairvaux* 272). The word is balanced in Bernard's work by his use of the word "interim" to signal the provisionality of every possible "today."

encounter.[6] As I hope I have shown, this theme has a long history of flaring out in unpredictable ways in literary texts that engage with Bernard's legacy.[7]

After this striking passage, Bernard makes some remarkable comments on the exegetical approach that has occasioned his remarks on Mary's Nativity. They grant some unusually candid hints into the sources of Bernardine style:

> Those who reproach me with having done something otiose and unnecessary should realize, however, that I did not so much intend to comment on the Gospel as to seize from the Gospel an occasion for speaking about something that it always gives me joy to speak about. If I have really sinned by rousing my own devotion rather than seeking the common good, then the gracious Virgin can make excuses to her merciful Son for my sin. Whatever its worth, I dedicated this little work of mine most devotedly to her. ("Noverint tamen qui me tamquam de otiosa et non necessaria explanatione suggillant, non tam intendisse exponere Evangelium, quam ex Evangelio sumere occasionem loquendi quod loqui delectabat. Si vero peccavi, quod propriam magis ex hoc excitarim devotionem quam communem quaesierim utilitatem, potens erit pia Virgo apud suum misericordem Filium hoc meum excusare peccatum, cui hoc meum qualecumque opusculum devotissime destinavi.") (4.11; IV:58)

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[6] Caroline Walker Bynum cautions that, although "the twelfth century . . . did in some sense discover—or rediscover—the self, the inner mystery, the inner man, the inner landscape. . . .it also discovered the group. . . .Moreover, these two aspects of the twelfth century go hand in hand—inner with outer, motive with model, self with community. A new sense of self, of inner change and inner choice, is precipitated by the necessity to choose among roles, among groups" ("Did the Twelfth Century" 106-7). On the other hand, "Bernard of Clairvaux and other 'new monks' stress discovery of self—and of self-love—as the first step in a long process of returning to love of and likeness to God" (86).

[7] It seems possible that at least some of Bernard's emphasis on experience comes from his engagement with the work of John Cassian. See, for example, Cassian's warning that "it is proved by experience that the attack of *acedia* must not be eschewed by flight, but fought by resistance" (*Institutes* X.25). If Bernardine "experience" is in its original context importantly monastic and contemplative, it may also be importantly, at its roots, the experience of the desert fathers.

Not to "comment," but to "seize": this recalls Henri de Lubac's remark that "by his whole manner" Bernard "treats Scripture with a new liberty; with an 'audacious liberty'. . . .As Saint Augustine had done in a few pages of lyric exaltation, but more habitually, he composes centos. He pulls the texts from their context. He appropriates them" (152). As this passage shows, Bernard himself was clearly aware of this. Stylistically his work is at once an innovation and a return to tradition, an extension of a neglected mode beyond what even Augustine had done with it. If the *Confessions* are more personal in a sense than any single work of Bernard's, Bernard's approach as a homilist is nonetheless more habitually personalized and idiosyncratic. As M.-D. Chenu recognized, "imbued as he was with Augustinian thought," Bernard "allowed its outlines and even its vocabulary to become blurred by his own personal experience" (61). What results is a theology defined as much by style as by substance, marked most of all by an insistence on the irreducible uniqueness of each person's encounter with the divine Word. As Bernard says of Mary's encounter with the Holy Spirit, "she alone was allowed to understand it because she alone was allowed to experience it" ("soli datum est nosse, cui soli datum est experiri") (4.4; IV:50). For Bernard there is no theological formula, no comprehensive speculative theology, that could do full justice to this experience.

More broadly, and also as these Marian texts help us to see, Bernard's legacy reacts to a lacuna around something like Augustinian "memory" on two fronts: in the careful attention to the humanity of Jesus and the need for Christians to "remember" the details of his bodily life, and in the privileging of experiential knowledge that leads to his celebrating Mary as a mediator between man and God, guaranteeing the work of God's mercy by going sometimes "biforn" the

prayer, "ful frely, er that men thyn help biseche" (VIII.55-6), as Chaucer translates Dante.[8] These two aspects of Bernard's genuine work are brought out very clearly in two of the most popular short works that were often misattributed to him in the late Middle Ages and after: the "Memorare" prayer to Mary and the hymn "Jesu dulcis memoria" ("sweet memory of Jesus"), which celebrates "eius dulcis praesentia" ("his sweet presence") in juxtaposition with this "sweet memory." The "Memorare" prayer is an especially good encapsulation of Bernardine Marianism, and beautifully models the way misattributed literary texts may themselves serve as insightful critical commentaries.[9] Both prayer and hymn, although mistakenly attributed to Bernard, capture something vital in Bernard's authentic thought: the importance of something like "memory" as the place where the divine and human are most deeply intertwined, and the stamp of the image of God remains latently accessible.

As I have indicated, if Chaucer did not encounter Bernard's rhetorical approach to experience and memory firsthand in the *Missus est* sermons, he nevertheless had a close analogue to it in the *De Maria Magdalena* sermon he claims to have translated in his youth. This sermon vividly imagines Mary Magdalene's moments of grief between the crucifixion and the resurrection, directly addressing its subject several times: "You seek him who seems to disregard your sorrow, who seems not to acknowledge your tears. For you call him and he does not hear, you pray to him and he does not listen" ("Illum vero queris qui videtur dolorem tuum negligere qui lacrimas tuas non videtur respicere. Vocas enim illum et non audit, oras et non exaudit") (327). This sermon writer goes even further than Bernard, addressing God himself as if he were

[8] Chaucer also translates this passage in the Prologue to the *Prioress's Tale*, and touches on similar themes in his "ABC" to the Virgin: "Soth is that God ne granteth no pitee / Withoute thee; for God of his goodnesse / Foryiveth noon, but it like unto thee. / . . . and he represseth his justice / After thi wil" (137-43).

[9] The prayer begins: "Memorare, O piissima Virgo Maria, non esse auditum a saeculo, quemquam ad tua currentem praesidia, tua implorantem auxilia, tua petentem suffragia, esse derelictum" ("Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that it is a thing unheard of, that anyone ever ran to you for protection, asked you for help, or begged for your intercession, and was left unaided").

still in the process of deciding what to do with Mary Magdalene: "Sweet master, why do you unsettle the mind and spirit of this woman who totally depends upon you, who totally rests in you, who totally hopes in you, who totally despairs over you?" ("Dulcis magister ad quid provocas spiritum huius mulieris et animum eius {que} tota pendet in te, tota manet in te, tota sperat in te, tota desperat de se") (334). Like Bernard, the author supplements the speaker's voice with constant recourse to scripture, interweaving Mary Magdalene's address with material from the *Song of Songs*: "Who will console me? Who will point out to me him whom my soul loves—where he has been laid, where he rests, where he sleeps? I beseech you, tell him since I languish for love and am exhausted by sorrow; there is no grief like mine. Return to me, beloved, beloved of my desires. . . .O my hope, do not confound my expectations, show me your face and it will satisfy my soul" ("Quis me consolabitur? Quis indicabit michi quem diligit anima mea ubi positus sit, ubi quiescat, ubi cubat? Queso nunciate illi quia amore langueo et dolore deficio, nec est dolor sicut dolor meus. Revertere dilecte mihi, dilecte votorum meorum. . . .O spes mea non confundas me ab expectacione mea, demonstra faciem tuam michi et sufficit anime mee") (333). The emphasis on the uniqueness of Mary Magdalene's experience—"there is no grief like mine"—leads the author on to the provocative assertion that it is precisely Mary Magdalene's state of near despairing hopelessness that explains her precedence in seeing the resurrected Jesus before the apostles: "Were you wiser than they, or rather did you love more than they since you were not afraid as they were? Certainly, Mary knew nothing more except how to love and how to grieve for the sake of love. She had forgotten to fear" ("Sapiebas plus illis an diligebas plus quam illi quia non metuebas ut illi. Certe modo nichil sapiebat Maria nisi diligere et pro dilectione dolere. Oblita erat timere") (326). Mary is also said to achieve a state beyond the divide between contemplative and active lives, which readers are encouraged seek for

themselves: “And lest perhaps you repulse him with a proud manner, incline yourself humbly and look into the sepulcher of God which is in you, and even if you see angels there, one at the head and one at the foot, that is, if you recognize in your heart steadfast heavenly desires for both the contemplative and the active life, which nevertheless do not guarantee the vision and possession of Jesus, do not content yourself with this . . . but weep, and seek Jesus in yourself until you find him” (“Et ne forte erecta cervice repellas eum a te humiliando inclina te et ita prospice in monumento dei quod est in te, et si videris ibi angelos unum ad caput et unum ad pedes idest cognoveris in corde tuo quasi celestia desideria tam ad contemplativam vitam quam ad activam pertinencia per que tamen non possis videre et habere ihesum, noli hiis contentus esse . . . sed plora, quere ihesum in te donec invenias”) (340-1). Even if he was not conditioned firsthand by Bernard’s Marian writings, then, the likely Cistercian homily on Mary Magdalene conditions Chaucer with an emphasis on the precedence of experience and of humility, and with a stylistic presentism that stresses the irreducible uniqueness of each act of human freedom.[10]

As I noted in Chapter Three, Lee Patterson has seen a prophetic dimension in Chaucer’s *Canon’s Yeoman’s Tale*: the servant who “blondren evere and pouren in the fir, / And for al that we faille of oure desir” (VIII.670-1), red-faced and breathless in his fascination with a quasi-magical technology he neither quite believes in nor can quite give up, is an eerily prescient figure for a “subjectively centered modernity” marked by a “strangely unspecifiable guilt” (“Perpetual Motion” 57). Eleanor Johnson makes the further observation that this may have something to do with the Yeoman’s being drawn into an endless flux of futurity, a space of infinite desire and

[10] Nicholas Watson observes that “One result of the twelfth-century reform movement’s encounter with heroic asceticism was that the ascetic ideal began to change under the influence of an affective spirituality that was more inclusive,” re-casting “the role of spiritual love” as “the power to burn away a lover’s sin in a way self-discipline alone could never achieve.” This influenced Chaucer’s “incarnational aesthetic.” In addition, “Affectivity also focused attention on the spiritual importance of the laity by elevating feeling over knowledge” (“Christian Ideologies” 78-9). I have argued here that the Bernardine line of influence, including but not limited to the sermon *De Maria Magdalena*, is one crucially important piece of this puzzle.

impossible fulfillment marked by an "inability to grasp—let alone take comfort in—time's linear progression as an epiphenomenal indication of divine providence and eternal love" (*Practicing Literary Theory* 147). The tale in this respect might be roughly aligned with Walter Benjamin's unpublished fragment on "capitalism as religion," which suggests that the economic engine of modernity, emerging first as a "parasite of Christianity in the West," can be characterized by a pervasive immanentization of a newly inexpungeable guilt: "A vast sense guilt that is unable to find relief seizes on the cult, not to atone for this guilt but to make it universal, to hammer it into the conscious mind, so as once and for all to include God in the system of guilt" (288-91). In my view, this process is already underway in some very popular, putatively Bernardine medieval texts like the *Meditationes piissimae* and the *Prick of Conscience*. Of the Canterbury pilgrims, Chaucer's Man of Law represents a particularly clear-eyed, diagnostic portrait of this process at work, as his Prologue twists some *contemptus mundi* material translated from Innocent's *De miseria humanae condicionis* into a grotesque association of poverty with guilt, which in turn prefaces his own tale "taughte" of a "marchant" (II.132-3). It is no coincidence, I think, that this tale reduces its protagonist to a passive commodity that circulates the globe like a limitlessly exchangeable good, and that can be protected only by a miraculous intervention in the context of the officially sanctioned legal machinery.[11] For this reason Harry Bailey is right to call the Man of Law's performance, with characteristic good humor, a "thrifty tale" (II.1165): it is brutally economical in the way it bends theological material toward a recommendation of pure passivity in the face of evil and endless striving to expunge the perceived guilt of poverty.

[11] Eleanor Johnson describes the "normative legal fantasy" of Custance's trial, where the real murderer is slain by divine fiat as soon as he perjures himself: "This particular instance, in which the guilty party is actually slain by God's hand, offers a spectacularly extreme embodiment of the legal logic that underpins the trial by sacred oath, namely, that God will not permit a guilty party to commit perjury. It indicates, quite clearly, that God's justice underpins the native law of England" ("English Law" 516).

But if the Canon's Yeoman is a prophetic figure, and the Man of Law an importantly diagnostic one, then the Second Nun's Cecilia must be understood as a prophetic character in her own right. Firmly linked to Bernardine Marianism by the Second Nun's Prologue, Chaucer's Cecilia embodies a mixture of the active and contemplative lives that is not so much a balance between them as simply both of them at the same time; her activity simply is her contemplation, and her "leveful bisynesse" (VIII.5) completely confounds several other traditional Christian binaries: she is married but chaste, a preacher but a woman, converting as much with her words as with the sweet savor of rose and lily crowns that are at once visible and invisible, anagogical signs of her eternal salvation and present sanctity.[12] In her name itself "Is joyned, by a manere conjoynynge / Of 'hevene' and 'Lia'; and here, in figurynge, / The 'hevene' is set for thoght of hoolynesse, / And 'Lia' for hire lastynge bisynesse" (VIII.95-8); "Men myghte hire wel 'the hevene of peple' calle," (VIII.104), as she is "Ful swift and bisy evere in good werkynge" as "hevene" itself "is swift and round and eek brennynge" (VIII.114-6).[13] Bearing the sign of the busy heavens in herself, Chaucer's Cecilia is a kind of activist contemplative, or contemplative activist, in a way that looks as modern in its own right as the Yeoman's alchemical toil. One recent critic has complained that Cecilia never prays, at least on camera, and that her very lack of passivity is a problem for the interpreter (Bugbee 208); but in fact, almost the Second Nun's first comment about her, after the etymology of her name, is that she "nevere cessed . . . / Of hir

[12] Sherry L. Reames notes that Wyclif "cited Cecilia's example as proof that the laity could perform minor sacraments like consecration," but suggests that Chaucer is "very careful" not to enter into any controversy in his own retelling of her tale (344). I think the category of "prophecy" is helpful for framing the way Chaucer uses Cecilia not as a polemical tool but as an intimation of new possibilities, and of deeper resources within the Christian tradition.

[13] Similarly, in a passage from the end of his treatise *De precepto et dispensatione* ("On Precept and Dispensation"), Bernard says that the "kingdom of God" that is within us in "the subtler invisibility of its nature" ("subtiliori suae naturae invisibilitate") is also present in the sun and moon and stars above us and outside of us, "in the immensity of [its] majesty" ("immensitate maiestatis")—"But these are deep matters and would require more careful study, not to mention a more studious writer and a longer work" ("Sed altissima sunt haec, egentia utique et diligentiori disputatione, et doctori disputatore, et opere prolixiori") (XX.61; III:293-4).

preyere and God to love and drede" (VIII.124-5). On the other side of this coin, Cecilia's active mastery of a quasi-courtroom rhetoric also recalls Chaucer's "ABC" of the Virgin Mary, his longest devotional poem in his own voice, which pushes its source toward a depiction of Mary as first of all our "advocat," a kind of impassioned, resolutely active legal defense against the dangers of a creeping sense of unatonable guilt (102).[14] Like the Host's, Cecilia's name perfectly designates her function, rendering her an anagogical figure in her own right, one who balances the capacity to "suffre" wrong "as a philosophre" with the refusal to "endure" "thilke wronges . . . / That thou spekest of oure goddes heere" (VIII.490-2). In the ancient figure of Cecilia, a modern way forward is charted for the Christian whose contemplation must be always active in the world.[15]

In view of Chaucer's translation of the *De Maria Magdalena* early in his career, it is not surprising that he is still occupied, in his tale of Cecilia, with suggesting creative ways around the active/contemplative distinction. It is perhaps more surprising that he does so with a Marian and Bernardine preface from Dante that he also translates elsewhere. It has not been noticed, I think, that this preface recasts its source to potentially implicate the figure of Bernard even more in the course of the Second Nun's narrative: the "oold man, clad in white clothes cleere" (VIII.201) who appears to read the creed to Cecilia's converted husband Valerian from a book "with lettre of gold" (VIII.202)—identified by the *Riverside Chaucer* with St. Paul (945)—may in fact recall, in the context of Chaucer's invocation of Dante, the "sene / vestito con le genti

[14] William E. Rogers points out that Chaucer "introduces a legal metaphor at least three times where there is no suggestion of it in his original," the Cistercian Deguileville's *Le pèlerinage de la vie humaine*, and links this to liturgical uses (*Image and Abstraction* 104). A passage from Bernard's sermon *On the Nativity of the Blessed Mary* cited above also calls Mary our "advocatus."

[15] John Bugbee notes the "explosion of Marian-miracle stories all over Europe in the high and late Middle Ages," where "Mary is almost nothing but active" (185). Chaucer's Marian Cecilia suggests that this hyper-activity can be laicized and applied beyond the exceptional figure of the Virgin Mary. After all, Cecilia is specifically called "the hevene of peple" (VIII.104).

gloriose" ("old man / dressed like the people in glory") of Dante's *Paradiso*, the at first mysterious replacement for Beatrice who of course turns out to be Dante's final guide, St. Bernard, the most famous of the white-habited monks (31.59-60). "Affetto al suo piacer" ("Moved to his pleasure") (32.1), St. Bernard speaks in Dante's *Paradiso* "A terminar . . . lo tuo disiro" ("to finish . . . (Dante's) desire") (31.65). He brings the conclusion the Canon's Yeoman's proto-capitalist alchemy can never reach. This is because his end is already present in his beginning: like the Second Nun's Cecilia, Bernard speaks from the heart, "moved" by his pleasure; as he says at the end of his *Missus est* sermons, he has seized "from the Gospel an occasion for speaking about something that it always give me joy to speak about." Dante echoes this manner of speaking at the end of the *Paradiso* when he says, "La forma universal di questo nodo / credo ch'i' vidi, perché più di largo, / dicendo questo, mi sento ch'i' godo" ("I believe that I saw / the universal form of this knot / because, in saying this, / I feel that my joy expands more largely") (33.91-3). This is an extraordinarily daring formulation, because it puts at the center of Christian experience and a theologically audacious poetry the barest justification of a feeling, a sense of joy, that can only be verified in the kind of open-ended exchange of affects and experiences that is modeled in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. It makes, in other words, an enormous wager on human feeling, and on that terminus of desire that Dante claims the soul will rest in when it reaches it, "come fera in lustra" ("like a beast in its lair"); "se non, ciascun disio sarebbe *frustra*" ("were it not so, then every desire would be in vain") (4.127-9). If the *Second Nun's Tale* is its own kind of prophecy, it is a prophecy of a world like this: one where the Gospel is first of all a matter of something like Bernardine "personal experience," wrenched out of its monastic contemplative context and put to the test of the sacrificial world.

Coda: Chiaravalle

In the Introduction to his study of Bernard's thought and rhetoric, M.B. Pranger compares Bernard's mix of affective engagement and rhetorical artfulness with the typical site of the medieval Cistercian monastery: "On the one hand, there is the austere but massive architectural form of the buildings making up the monastic complex, with their simple geometrical proportions. On the other hand, there is the extreme, untamed wildness of the surrounding landscape. Yet it is one single image which is conveyed to the eye of the beholder" (*Bernard of Clairvaux* 3-4). In the United Kingdom, of course, prominent Cistercian abbeys like Fountains and Rievaulx stand now as overgrown ruins, cultural tourist sites that nonetheless permit the "extreme, untamed wildness" of the original landscapes to grow back over the austere, geometrical architecture for which Bernard was, in some instances, directly responsible.[16] Preserved in some ways more carefully but in others still more given over to unpredictable alterations, un-ruined sites like Morimondo and Chiaravalle outside of Milan convey different lessons about the specific character of the Cistercian "stylists." In particular, the monastery at Chiaravalle, a personal foundation of St. Bernard's, represents an impressive organic accretion of the art of later eras in the life of the Order. Layer upon layer of artistic homage to Bernard's foundation gathers against the backdrop of the abbey's original design, just on the cusp of Gothic and Romanesque, with its distinctively flattened apse and bare mullioned windows: a rare frescoed dormition of the Virgin scene, attributed to Giotto's school, with the traditional palm branch painted at the bottom of the lantern tower; an early *Madonna della Buonanotte* by Leonardo's disciple Bernardino Luini in the southern transcript leading up to Bramante's cloister; an intricately carved wooden choir, dating to the early seventeenth-century, representing

[16] Fontenay Abbey is one foundation of which Bernard is supposed to have been directly involved in the design.

a three-dimensional scene from the life of Bernard in every stall; and even an elaborate family tree of the Cistercian Order, featuring Bernard and William seated among the leaves, also in the southern transept, part of a later series of Baroque frescoes that were completed around the same time as the choir. The incongruity of this cento-esque collage of artworks belies its deep resonance with the spirit and style of Bernard: a return to simplicity that is at the same time "a sudden inflation of this language of 'sweetness,' tied to a more pronounced interiorization of the mystery" (de Lubac 173). The apparent austerity and formal rigor of the Cistercian movement has to be understood alongside the explosive inventiveness of its literary style, and of the new "spirit of freedom" that moved through it. If the interiors of Cistercian churches are most often bare and unadorned, it is at least in part because they are meant to be a blank canvas, an empty page on which to write something new.

The dormition of the Virgin scene is especially striking. Due to differences in Catholic and Orthodox thinking on the question of whether Mary died before she was taken up to heaven, it is rare to find it depicted in a western church. Depictions of Mary's Assumption into heaven are far more common. But its presence in a church of Bernard's founding captures something essential about Bernard's theological emphases, and what I have described in Chapter Two as his peculiarly linguistic, capacious, sign-based view of sacramental theology. Even Mary, Bernard reminds his listener in the sermon for her Nativity, does not get exactly what she asked for: "She had asked that the full light of midday, where the bridegroom finds pasture, should be disclosed to her, but it was kept back, and instead of the full light she received the shadow, and instead of fullness the taste" ("Lucem quippe meridianam, ubi pascit sponsus, sibi petierat indicari; sed repressa est, et pro plenitudine luminis umbram, pro satietate interim gustum recepit") (2; V:276). Yet for Bernard, Mary's inhabiting this "eschatological tension" occasions, at least as

much as it does a sense of deprivation and rebuff, a delicate celebration of the in-betweenness of memory. In this state, "[the bride] knows that if she is faithful in the shadows of memory she will beyond doubt attain to the light of his presence" ("Novit enim quod si fidelis fuerit in umbra memoriae, lucem praesentiae sine dubio obtinebit") (13; V:284); "Jesus always loves the middle place" ("Amat semper media Iesus") (17; V:287). At the beginning of the sermon on Mary's Nativity, the figure of Mary embodies for Bernard this state of in-betweenness:

> The heavens cherish the presence of the fruitful Virgin, and the earth venerates her memory. Thus all her goodness is shown there, and here is found its remembrance: there is fullness, here a poor offering of the first fruits; there is the substance, here only the name. . . .Would you know why her name and memory are among us and the reality in heaven? *Thus shall you pray*, he said: *Our Father, who are in heaven, hallowed be your name*. Faithful is the prayer whose very beginning reminds us both of our divine adoption and of our sojourning on earth.
>
> ("Fecundae Virginis amplectitur caelum praesentiam, terra memoriam veneratur. Sic nimirum totius boni illic exhibitio, hic recordatio invenitur: ibi satietas, hic tenuis quaedam libatio primitiarum; ibi res, et hic nomen. . . .Vis scire quia nomen et memoriale eius in nobis est, praesentia in excelso? Sic Orabitis, iniquit: Pater noster, qui es in caelis, sanctificetur nomen tuum. Fidelis oratio, cuius ipsa primordia et divinae adoptionis, et terrenae peregrinationis admoneant.") (1; V:275)

The figure of Mary is re-imagined here as the paradigmatic sign, a "memory" that reminds us of both our "divine adoption" and of our present incompleteness.[17] On the theme of Mary Bernard's

[17] M.B. Pranger claims that for Bernard Mary represents "a certain terrestrial purity which connects us with the divine," the "link between the divine presence and the realm of shadows in which we live. However, her position . . . does more than mediate between light and darkness, reality and shadow. . . .she holds together the notions of desire and fulfilment, daylight turned into darkness, midday sleep into violence. . . .It is precisely within this context that

teaching on self-knowledge and conscience, harsh as it is in some places and harsher as it became in the history of his influence, softens and grow more confident, as if another Bernardine Christianity were hidden in the figure of Mary, the sleeping Mother of God whose memory fills the earth:

> What else do we want, brothers? Let us ask for grace, and let us ask through Mary, because she finds what she seeks, and she cannot be disappointed. Let us ask for grace, but grace from God. For from humans grace is a delusion. Let others ask for merit; let us eagerly seek to meet with grace. Why? Is it not because of grace that we are here? Surely *it is of the mercy of God that we are not consumed*. What are we? We are false, murderers, adulterers, thieves, the scum of the earth. Examine your consciences, brothers, and see that *where sin abounds, there grace abounds all the more*.
>
> ("Quid nos alia concupiscimus, fratres? Quaeramus gratiam, et per Mariam quaeramus, quia quod quaerit invenit, et frustrari non potest. Quaeramus gratiam, sed gratiam apud Deum; nam apud homines gratia fallax. Quaerant alii meritum, nos invenire gratiam studeamus. Quid enim? Non gratiae est quod hic sumus? Profecto Misericordiae Domini est, Quod non sumus consumpti nos. Qui nos? Nos periuri, nos homicidae, nos adulteri, nos raptores, purgamenta utique mundi huius. Consulite conscientias vestras, fratres, et videte, quia Ubi abundavit delictum, superabundat et gratia.") (8; V:280)

That the Christian tradition has maintained this association between Bernard and the figure of Mary, and gradually lost its interest in the mixed Bernardine and Pseudo-Bernardine figure of the

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Bernard's concept of spiritual love can be seen as an oblique form of fulfilment. . . .not the same as *languor* hypostatized to which Gilson objected [in distinguishing between Bernard's love of God and courtly love]. . . .It deserves rather to be called a new assessment of the whole process of love" (*Bernard of Clairvaux* 162).

"worm of conscience" that haunted the *Meditationes piissimae* and *Prick of Conscience*, is the last interpretive commentary that I will offer here.

Conclusion

Although it was not originally planned as such, this dissertation has had as much to say about Bernard of Clairvaux as it has about the Middle English writers examined in it. In the first chapter, I offered a re-reading of *Piers Plowman*'s Nede according to a Bernardine anagogical lens, arguing that the "eschatological tension" characteristic of anagogical thinking was responsible for the deep critical confusion around the character, and that this neglected dimension of medieval exegesis could help us to understand the apocalyptic ending of the poem better. This reading required a sympathetic interpretation of one of the sermons from Bernard's masterwork, the *Sermones super cantica canticorum*, and an attempt to sketch a view of Bernardine anagogy and anagogical style.

The second chapter tied this reading of *Piers Plowman* back into the context of fourteenth-century theology, especially the turn toward the priority of affect and experience for which Bernard was one of the great inspirations, and a lingering dissatisfaction with non-covenantal modes of imagining God's relationship with his creation. I offered a new reading of the figure of Conscience in *Piers Plowman* in terms of, and somewhat in opposition to, this theological background. I then turned to Bernard's crusade preaching, and to its influence on the songs of Jaufre Rudel, to illustrate the influential Bernardine dualism that often existed uneasily alongside this more covenantal emphasis. This also helped me to ground my readings of Bernard's presence in later texts in a case of significant, possibly direct influence.

As a hinge at the center of the dissertation, the Pseudo-Bernardine *Meditationes piissimae* opened up avenues to understanding what I have called the "figure of Bernard" in Middle English imaginative literature with a greater complexity and nuance. Between the end of Chapter Two and the beginning of Chapter Three, I demonstrated how this influential text helped inform the idea of Bernard as preaching constantly on the themes of *contemptus mundi*, chastened self-understanding, and the terrors of judgment day. This forbidding figure appears in the widely circulated *Prick of Conscience* and in *Piers Plowman*, and acts as a useful foil for understanding Chaucer's original theological contributions and the way they shape *The Canterbury Tales*. I argued that Chaucer should be understood as a "counter-theologian" with an ambitious, if playfully articulated, theological agenda, which his enigmatic figure of the Host in particular embodies, and which shares certain key sympathies with Bernard's authentic work.

In my fourth chapter, I returned to the method of Chapter One to apply another Bernardine interpretive "lens," this time one having to do more with self-knowledge and with the specific problems of presumption and despair, as a way to understand what Malory was doing with some of his most original source adaptations and additions in the *Morte Darthur*. I agreed with previous critical judgments in seeing Malory as a somewhat typical fifteenth-century layman, but attempted to show how distinctively "lay" and nuanced theological preoccupations nonetheless fundamentally shaped his remarkably complex source use. Though I did not have the time to elaborate this at adequate length, I also suggested that Julian of Norwich could be understood as a particularly useful source for understanding the way Bernardine thought evolved and transformed in later vernacular literature.

Every step of the way, I have been surprised by Bernard. I have become convinced that both as a thinker and as a rhetorician, he is far more important for the late Middle Ages in

England than has been generally acknowledged, at least in my own field of literary criticism. His great advantage, in my view, was his intellectual and rhetorical flexibility—or, put more tritely, the fact that he doesn't really make sense. Making not "sense" but "room," in Rowan Williams's phrase from my epigraph, Bernard's writings are therefore not just influential but really generative, encouraging his literary heirs to go beyond him with the same "audacity" he modeled in his own work. Even the forbidding, quasi-dualistic Bernard that emerged in the shadow of the *Meditationes piissimae* was a challenge to its readers, a gauntlet thrown down that later authors had to either pick up or work around.

The extent to which this has become a study of Bernard as much as a study of Langland, Chaucer, and Malory, is indicative of its methodological commitments. Combining Nicolette Zeeman's idea of 'imaginative theory" as embodied in literary texts with Barbara Newman's suggestion that we must understand late medieval literature in terms of a culture of sacred and secular "crossover," I have crossed over Bernardine theories with those of Middle English vernacular authors, noting points of possibly direct or indirect contact but also, especially in the case of Chaucer's Host and of Malory, arguing for a deeper understanding of the way that late medieval imaginative texts can be theologically informed, even when they do not explicitly engage with theological sources. Whether the method works or not in my view depends almost entirely on whether it helps to make these vernacular authors not just more legible but more interesting, more striking, as if we were reading them for the first time.

This dissertation has shown that crossing Bernard over with vernacular literature can make both the literature and the theology strange and new. I did not mean to treat the saint as a static theorist whose ideas could be simply "applied" to the literary texts I examined, but rather to capture the dynamism of Bernardine thought in action in its influence in later works of

imaginative literature, and to capture some of creativity of the responses his work directly or indirectly elicited. I have described a dialogue and a series of creative re-purposings, not a set of straightforward applications. If Bernard was widely considered, as Robert of Basevorn considered him, one of the three great preachers after Christ and St. Paul, it is no surprise that his literary presence in the late Middle Ages was as widespread and deeply "inculcated" as I have found it to be. It is a body of work that, like Julian of Norwich's, asks to be "performed," and that is perhaps still in a sense unfinished. The Cistercian turn inward, which Bernard himself explains in terms of the idea that the Kingdom of God is "already there within, but not yet appearing" ("intus iam manens, sed nondum apparens") (XX.61; III:293-4),[18] models an ethic of self-knowledge, simplicity, and humility that still has something to say to contemporary theology, ethics, and aesthetics.

Each chapter of this dissertation has suggested avenues for inquiry that I have not been able to explore myself. The first chapter is perhaps the most self-contained, but its intervention in a long-standing critical controversy invites further reflection on anagogical thinking in the late Middle Ages, and the way our own exegetical horizons may still be conditioned by scholastic modes of reading that tend to collapse the "eschatological tension" embodied in apocalyptic figures like Langland's Nede. My second chapter asks for a re-appraisal of the widely acknowledged turn to affect in fourteenth-century vernacular theology, suggesting that the Bernardine strain was more important than has been realized, and that this strain remains latent in important ways all the way up to the Reformation and beyond, not just in its well-known emphasis on the humanity of Christ but also in its balanced stress on interiority and on the covenantal nature of God's commitment to his creation. This chapter, in conjunction with the

[18] This passage occurs at the end of Bernard's treatise *De precepto et dispensatione* ("*On Precept and Dispensation*").

beginning of the third, also suggests that a translation of the *Meditationes piissimae de cognitione humanae conditionis*—which would probably require a new edition of the text as well—might be very useful for making the landscape of fourteenth-century vernacular theology more intelligible, since it fundamentally shapes the *Prick of Conscience* and provides a pivotal moment for *Piers Plowman*.

My third chapter serves almost as an Introduction to another work, a thorough reading of Chaucer's theological sympathies and the way they inform his literary gambles. A longer treatment could deal with the influence of the work of the Cistercian Guillaume de Deguileville on Chaucer, which might also help to expand the scope of this study beyond Bernard to other influential Cistercian writers like Isaac of Stella and Aelred of Rievaulx. Significant theological aspects of Chaucer's work, like his alleged translation of the sermon *De Maria Magdalena*, his "ABC" to the Virgin Mary and his Marian devotion in general, and his relationship with the anti-Wycliffite philosopher Ralph Strode, remain somewhat sidelined topics in Chaucer studies, mostly confined to brief examinations in one-off articles separated by decades. If the "Host" is a eucharistic pun that Chaucer makes on purpose, then the theological horizons of his work are blown wide open, and further research is necessary.

My fourth chapter is, like Chapter One, a bit more self-contained, but its occasional use of Julian of Norwich's theology as a reference point suggests what is perhaps the most conspicuously omitted line of inquiry here: the question of Bernard's influence on vernacular theological and devotional, as opposed to what I have called "imaginative," literature, from Julian to Richard Rolle and Walter Hilton to the *Ancrene Wisse*, which is much more explicitly shaped by Bernard's *Sermones super cantica canticorum* than anything I have examined here. This supplementary study could culminate with Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of*

Jesus Christ, a heavily Bernardine text that massively expands on the sense of Bernard's devotion to the humanity of Jesus, a central facet of Bernard's reputation in medieval Europe but not one that I explored at any length in this dissertation. This would involve it in more intellectual-historical questions about the pedagogical and ideological purposes of such writing, as Love's text is well known for its anti-Lollard, hyper-orthodox agenda. It could also do more justice to the way theological and devotional texts can "cross over" with the imaginative works I have paid close attention to here, and to the way the line between Latin and vernacular tends to blur in works that so deeply inculcate Bernard's and others' voices as to confound linguistic boundaries.

My shorter, supplementary fifth chapter above examines Bernard's work in terms of his later reputation for Marian devotion, especially as it manifests in Chaucer's *Second Nun's Tale*. In arguing that the "figure of Bernard" looms larger in this particular tale than has been noticed, and that the figure of Cecilia is intended to be in a sense prophetic, I raise larger theological questions, beyond the scope of this dissertation and of my field: why exactly is Bernardine Marianism, in a mix of authentic works and apocryphal texts like the "Memorare," the strand of his work that survives the most strongly in Chaucer's time and our own? What does Marianism, in the work of St. Bernard and elsewhere, really mean, and how was it related to Bernard's innovations in literary style? And what—to risk a more than academic question—might other traditions have lost, in losing this "advocat"?

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